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Leonard Cohen en la aldea global:

construcciones de la identidad y el deseo de su poética

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTORA
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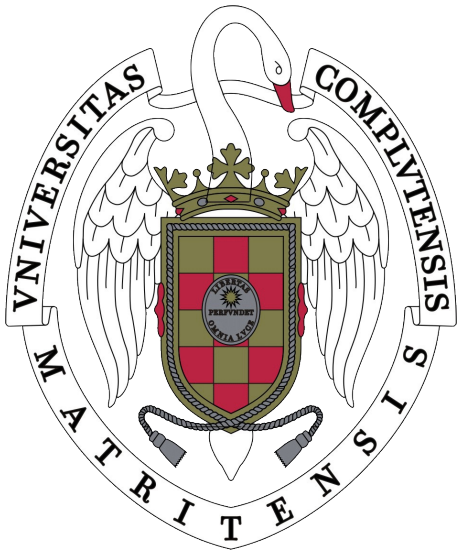

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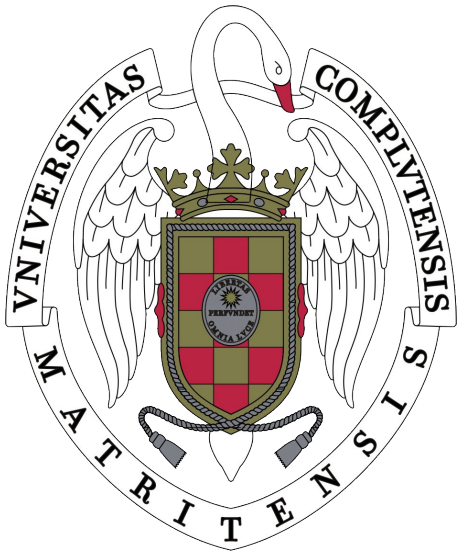

LEONARD COHEN IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY AND DESIRE IN HIS POETICS

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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INTRODUCTION

Give me a Leonard Cohen afterworld
So I can sigh eternally.

Kurt Cobain, "Pennyroyal Tea".

Dylan blew everybody's mind, except Leonard's.

Allen Ginsberg.

This research approaches the study of the works of the Canadian author Leonard Cohen in the decade of the 1960's. It attempts to explore and contextualize questions of identity and desire that have marked Cohen's production throughout all his career. The works that have been selected for this purpose include poetry collections -*The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961) and *Flowers for Hitler* (1964)-; fiction -*The Favourite Game* (1963) and *Beautiful Losers* (1966)-; and studio albums -*Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967) and *Songs from a Room* (1969)-. This dissertation is, then, a journey through the different creative expressions that the Montreal poet explored in the sixties to express artistic, political, social, and individual concerns that have shaped the artist's identities and desires. It captures Cohen's evolution from young and romantic poet, rebellious and provocative writer to finally folk singer in the same tradition that Nietzsche described the figure of the lyricist in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872); he is, then, a poet that encounters in folk music the dual Apollonian and Dionysian impulse that captivates audiences.

In this regard, Cohen's evolution might be easily framed by Marshall McLuhan's concept of 'The Global Village', a term popularized in the Canadian's philosopher work *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962). By means of electronic technology, McLuhan believes that the world has been contracted into a village where information is instantly shared by everyone. It is in this new electronic era where Cohen manages to find his audience and achieve popularity. He leaves aside his

career as poet and fiction writer in order to commit himself to the profession of the troubadour; accommodated in the global village, he becomes a spokesman for his generation with captivating and mysterious songs that abandon the form of the printed book of 'The Gutenberg Galaxy' and embrace the orality of 'The Global Village'. Nevertheless, Cohen's themes and obsessions remain the same whether they are expressed through poems, novels, or songs.

Different *Cohens* concur along the 1960's decade: the romantic, the cynical, the anti-poet, the beatnik, the rebellious, the non-conformist that denounces colonial practices and social distress, the provocative that challenges conventions, the traditionalist, etc. In order to approach each one of them, this research takes as reference the work of several Canadian critics and theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, Michael Ondaatje, or Stephen Scobie; it draws on Sylvie Simmons's biography *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* (2012); and it gathers and uses the work of relevant thinkers and philosophers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the aforementioned Marshall McLuhan, etc. Furthermore, the thesis leans on the articles of various scholars who have studied the works of Leonard Cohen in depth for the analysis and interpretations of the Montreal artist's texts.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters and a final section of conclusions. Chapter one -'*The Spice Box-of Earth*: Poems of a Dark-Romantic Jew'- studies the volume of poetry *The Spice-Box of Earth* by deepening into Cohen's artistic and Jewish identity, as well as by exploring the poet's world of desire from a 'dark romantic' perspective. Chapter two -'*The Favourite Game*: A Fictionalization of Cohen's Artistic Persona'- analyses Cohen's first novel *The Favourite Game* as a central text to understand the Canadian artist's identity and his life in art by means of the alter ego of Lawrence Breavman, the protagonist of the novel. The next chapter -'*Flowers for Hitler*: From Romance to the Concentration Camp'- returns back to the lyric genre in order to approach *Flowers for Hitler* as a text that signals Cohen's shift into the social sphere, probably influenced by the Beat generation of the fifties and the fall into silence of the poet and mentor Abraham. M. Klein, Cohen focuses his interests in the exploration of the concept of evil in the twentieth century by using the Holocaust and Nazi imagery as literary figures.

Chapter four -'*Beautiful Losers*: A Canadian Postmodernist Novel in the Realms of Desire'- continues to deepen into Cohen's preference for the social and political, but it introduces as well a world of saints and 'beautiful losers' that are at the core of his artistic production; furthermore, *Beautiful Losers* signals the path to the Canadian Postmodern due to the disruptive character of the work. Finally, chapter five -'*Songs of Leonard Cohen* and *Songs from a Room*: A New Direction in Cohen's Career'- deals with Cohen's studio albums *Songs of Leonard Cohen* and *Songs form a Room,* where the Canadian artist sings in his first record to a world of lovers and romance, whereas in the second one he opts for an anti-war message that denounces violence and the exploitation of soldiers in the time of the Vietnam War.

It is interesting to notice how Cohen's first volumes of poetry -*Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956) and *The Spice-Box of Earth-;* his first novel -*The Favourite Game-*; and his first studio album -*Songs of Leonard Cohen*- deal all of them with the personal universe of the Canadian artist, who struggles to find equilibrium between his commitment to artistic creation and his devotion for his loving relationships; furthermore, Cohen incorporates his Jewish inheritance into this personal world, so throughout his texts there are numerous religious symbols and figures from the Hebraic tradition that help him to affirm his identity and express his individual self. Nevertheless, Cohen's third volume of poetry -*Flowers for Hitler-*; his second novel -*Beautiful Losers-*; and his second record -*Songs from a Room*- have a very different spirit from the Montreal artist's previous works, since the focus in these new artistic creations relies on the outside rather than inside, then Cohen seems to make a move towards a more socially engaged 'I' with his latter productions. Different *Cohens*, then, emerge in the same decade.

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Cohen's literary and cultural background goes back to his accommodated childhood in the rich suburb of Westmount in Montreal, where the prosperous Jewish and English community lived and ruled the city with

factories and businesses. Born in 1934, the Montreal artist enjoyed the commodities of an upper middle-class family, so he came to know at an early age the Great English poets -Chaucer, Wordsworth, Byron, etc.- from the leather bound collection that his father Nathan Cohen received as a gift for his 'bar mitzvah'. Although Cohen's father -the owner of a prosperous clothing business- was not a literary man and he died when Cohen was only nine years old, the young Montreal poet was influenced by the figure of his maternal grandfather the Rabbi Solomon Klonitsky-Kline, a Talmudic writer of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry who encouraged him to write; furthermore, Cohen's mother -Masha Cohen- was a devoted singer that taught Cohen Yiddish and Russian folk songs that the Montreal artist would eventually remember as a grown-up man making records.

Cohen's adolescence in the fifties was marked by the uncertainty of the times; the Cold War between Russian and the United States menaced to end with the welfare of Canada, a nation that had emerged from the Second World War as a world power with a prosperous market economy. The influence of the media with negative and fearful messages impacted a whole generation of youngsters who grew up with the uncertainty of a future. Nevertheless, Cohen found a refuge in the world of poetry, specially in the verses of the poet Federico García Lorca, with which he came across in a second-hand bookshop when randomly browsing he found *The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca* and read "Gacela Of The Morning"; the poem shook him at his sixteen years old and he began to write poetry to respond to Lorca, as he recently recognized in his acceptance speech for the 'Prince of Asturias Award':

> I could say that when I was a young man, an adolescent, and I hungered for a voice, I studied the English poets and I knew their work well, and I copied their styles, but I could not find a voice. It was only when I read, even in translation, the works of Lorca that I understood that there was a voice. It is not that I copied his voice; I would not dare. But he gave me permission to find a voice, to locate a voice, that is to locate a self, a self that is not fixed, a self that struggles for its own existence. As I grew older, I understood that

> instructions came with this voice. What were these instructions? The instructions were never to lament casually. And if one is to express the great inevitable defeat that awaits us all, it must be done within the strict confines of dignity and beauty (as cited in *Fundación Príncipe de Asturias* 2011).

Lorca introduced Cohen into his "dark, melodious, elegiac, and emotionally intense, honest and at the same time self-mythologising" (Simmons 2012: 29) literary universe unknown until then for the Canadian artist; furthermore, the young Cohen learnt with Lorca's verses about "the sorrow, romance and dignity of flamenco" (Simmons 2012: 29), a music that would mark his life and his career as a songwriter.

Two years later after Cohen's discovery of Lorca's poetry, the young Canadian enrolled at McGill University to study English and Economics. He met there professors like Louis Dudek, Frank Scott, and Hugh MacLennan that introduced him to the Montreal literary scene and encouraged him to publish his first volume of poetry *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956) when he was still a college student. Cohen was deeply influenced by these professors and the literary meetings and gatherings they held outside University; however, it was an assistant political science teacher, Irving Layton, the poet that truly made a difference in Cohen's life. Irving Layton became Cohen's friend despite all odds: Layton was twenty-two years Leonard's senior, he was born in Romania and raised in a Montreal working, Jewish, and immigrant neighbourhood, he despised the bourgeois class to whom Cohen belonged, and he had fought in the Canadian Army. Furthermore, he was a poet with rude manners dressed in threadbare clothes that contrasted with Cohen's natural elegance. Nevertheless, admiration between them was reciprocal and they even ended writing together a set of theatrical pieces. As Cohen said later about him, "He is our greatest poet, our greatest champion of poetry" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 45).

The other Montreal and Jewish poet that greatly influenced Cohen was Abraham. M. Klein, he was a friend of Irving Layton whom Cohen admired for his work and his role as precursor of Canadian Jewish literature. Klein's poetry -traditional and with Yiddish echoes- was far away from Layton's

visceral and modernist experiments, as well as from Cohen's early romanticism. Nevertheless, the three of them belonged to the same literary linage of Montreal and Jewish poets founded by Klein, even if their orientations and styles, as Norman Ravvin wrote, differ substantially:

> The differences include their formation in radically different poetic milieus: Klein in the English tradition of Milton and Shakespeare, along with the Yiddish writers of his youth; Layton among his modernist compatriots of the 1940s and the aggressively nativist writing of Americans such as Robert Creeley and William Carlos Williams; and Cohen's early imagistic writing developed under the tutelage of Dudek, but which then gave way to something more unpredictable, informed as much by American folk songs as Chassidic legend (2007: 112).

It was precisely Klein's fall into silence what made Cohen to reflect over his work. The Montreal writer felt that it was his duty as a young Jewish artist to honour Klein's work and respond to it by becoming the prophet and outsider of the community that Klein had been until the moment, then Cohen undertook a new path in his writing career that separated him from his personal world of lovers and threw him to the outside world with works like *Flowers for Hitler* or *Beautiful Losers.* Nevertheless, it would not be until the release of his first studio album that he truly became a spokesman for his generation.

After college and the successful publication of *Let Us Compare Mythologies,* Cohen enrolled at Columbia University to do graduate studies in New York; there he met his first muse and girlfriend Georgianna Sherman and some of the members of the Beat generation that were agitating the literary scene with poetry readings and bebop jazz at the end of the fifties. Despite Cohen was interested in the movement and attended poetry readings like the one that Jack Kerouak gave in the Village Vanguard's club, he never belonged to the group since his work was still too romantic and conservative for the standards of the Beat. Nevertheless, he was already influenced by them

when he left New York and travelled to Europe; there he lived first in London, where he roamed the streets and the bars of the city in the company of the writer Nancy Bacal, and after in the Greek island of Hydra, where he bought a house and met a community of artists that satisfied his modest aspirations; furthermore, Cohen fell in love in Hydra with the Norwegian Marianne, the protagonist of many of the Canadian's most famous poems and songs.

However, despite Cohen's love for Marianne, Hydra and the Mediterranean sea, the Montreal writer decided to return back to North America at the end of the sixties in order to become a songwriter. He lived in New York and became friends with many of the folk stars of the moment, such as Judy Collins, Janis Joplin, Lou Reed, Nico, etc. Despite his age -he was already thirty and older than the rest of musicians- he managed to find a spot in the music business and became successful with his songs to the extent that he still publishes today studio albums such as his recent *Popular Problems*, a record released on September 22, 2014, a day after his eightieth birthday. Nonetheless, Cohen had walked an intense path before he knew world-wide success, and it is precisely the decade of the sixties when the Canadian artist produced some of his most interesting works; furthermore, it is in this period of time where the different *Cohens* of all of his artistic works emerge, whether they are expressed through the words of poems, novels, or songs.

CHAPTER I

The Spice-Box of Earth: Poems of a 'Dark-Romantic' Jew

This chapter features Cohen's second volume of poetry *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961) as a central text to understand the artist's identity in the realms of creation, romantic and sexual relationships, and the meaning of tradition within a Jewish background. The chapter is divided into five sections: 'The Volume of *The Spice-Box of Earth*', 'The Gears of Creation', 'The Dark Side of Love', 'The Weight of Tradition', and '*The Spice-Box of Earth: A Recapitulation*'.

Section one approaches the volume from a general point of view. It deals with the publication and critical reception of Cohen's poetry at the time, then it summarizes the style and language of the book, it describes the themes and symbols, and it finally introduces the paradox of the 'romantic irony' that prevails in this work, as well as in Cohen's following production. The next section analyses those poems of the collection concerned with the figure of the artist and the processes of creation. It approaches the question by means of power and control relationships between the poet and the work of art, such as it happens in "A Kite is a Victim", the opening poem and one of the most representative of the collection. It introduces the anti-poetic attitude in poems such as "I Have not Lingered in European Monasteries" or "The Cuckold's Song", as well as it approaches concepts of modernist poetry.

The third section of the chapter is 'The Dark Side of Love', which takes its point of departure from Sandra Djawa's article "Leonard Cohen: Black Romantic" (1967), in which the critic affirms that Cohen's poetry belongs to the 'Black Romantic' tradition of poets like Baudelaire and Rimbaud. The

section explores the love poems of the collection, most of them concerned with personal obsessions, uncertainties, fears, etc. In this regard, the relationships described in them function in terms of 'master' or 'slave'. The section also bridges poems like "You Have the Lovers" with Cohen's novel *Beautiful Losers*, since it shows a new dimension of religion in which sexuality plays a central role; other poems of this section share as well multiples parallelisms with Cohen's first novel *The Favourite Game*, such as "Travel" or "As the Mist Leaves No Scar".

Section four explores Cohen's attachment to his Jewish background: from artists like A.M Klein and Irving Layton -to whom Cohen renders homage- to the certification of the end of a tradition in the form of the decay of religious symbols. Cohen also explores the destiny of the Hebraic nation: from the bright side of "Out of the Land of Heaven" to the dark angle of "The Genius", where Jewish stereotypes lead the nation to the Holocaust tragedy. Also, the Canadian artist deals with the figure of the prophet in poems like "Isaiah" or "Lines from my Grandfather's Journal"; this last one dedicated to his maternal grandfather announces a change of direction in Cohen's poetry.

Finally, section five summarizes and gathers the main ideas of the chapter.

1.1. *The Spice-Box of Earth*

The Spice-Box of Earth was published in a beautiful hardback designed by the artist Frank Newfeld, it was an unusual format for a poetry volume that attracted the audience. It contained eighty-eight poems written in the period between Columbia University and Cohen's stay in London. Cohen dedicated the volume to his paternal grandmother Mrs. Lyon Cohen and to his maternal grandfather Mr. Kline, the Rabbi of the family and Talmud scholar. The book included as well comments from the critic Northrop Frye, who celebrated "his outstanding poetic quality, so far, is a gift for macabre ballad reminding one of Auden, but thoroughly original, in which the chronicles of tabloids are celebrated in the limpid rhythms of folk song" (2003: 165), and from the poet Douglas Lochhead, who viewed Cohen's poetry as "strong,

intense and masculine" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 97). Cohen wrote a paragraph of his own in which he declared his love for the Mediterranean -at the moment of the publication he was already living in the Greek island of Hydra-, but he recognized partly ironic his 'neurotic affiliations' with Montreal: "I shouldn't be in Canada at all. I belong beside the Mediterranean. My ancestors made a terrible mistake. But I have to keep coming back to Montreal to renew my neurotic affiliations" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 97).

The popularity of *The Spice-Box of Earth* has increased with time to the point that the book is one of the best-selling volumes of Canadian poetry. It did not won at the time the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry, but the majority of literary critics received it with enthusiasm. Robert Weaver wrote in the *Toronto Daily Star* that Leonard was "probably the best young poet in English Canada right now" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 99), whereas other critics like Louis Dudek or Arnold Edinborough enthusiastically applauded the volume. Of course, there were negative reports too such as the one of David Broomige in *Canadian Literature* that recommended Cohen to "write less about love, and think about it longer" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 100); but in general terms Cohen's second book of poetry represented an undoubtedly critical and best-selling success.

In comparison with *Let Us Compare Mythologies,* Cohen's second book of poetry achieves a maturer voice and a refinement of style. Instead of the baroque and ornamental language that the poet uses in his first collection, he opts for simplicity in *The Spice-Box of Earth*. In Juan Rodriguez's words, "Things are stated simply here: they come and go" (1976: 64). Cohen uses, then, a contemporary language that wants to avoid ambiguities, so it is the precise economy of language that modernist poets like Ezra Pound demanded what prevails in the volume, then "Most of all, the symbols can easily exist as real objects. Cohen is seldom just allegorical. When he talks of bones, he means bones" (Ondaatje 1970: 19). In this regard, *The Spice-Box of Earth* adopts the precise imagery and clear language of imagists like Pound even if the poet does not renounce on the other hand to the atmosphere of beauty and sensuality of his former volume.

Furthermore, Cohen seems to move from a formal understanding of

poetry to a more intuitive art in which he abandons mythologies in order to explore his individual concerns, "he relies on the strict ballad form rather than the biblical rhetoric" (Ondaatje 1970: 19). It is consequently a more personal book than his predecessor, but he does not completely eradicate tradition from *The Spice-Box of Earth,* he adapts it instead to his personal angle in order to create his own poetic universe. In this poetic universe reign romantic relationships and the figure of the artist, for Ondaatje, "compared to his first collection, *The Spice-Box of Earth* was a more professional and less varied book. Cohen dropped his wide-ranging view of the world and turned to two specific themes or subjects: himself as an artist, and his love-life" (1970: 15). But to the themes of love and the role of the poet, which are directly linked with Cohen's persona, Scobie adds a third one, which is "the inheritance of Jewish tradition" (1978: 25).

In fact, the title of the book stands as a symbol of Cohen's Jewish identity. 'The Spice-Box' alludes to "the ornate wooden box of fragrant spices used in the Jewish ceremony marking the end of Sabbath and the beginning of secular week" (Simmons 2012: 98); but as Cohen biographer highlights, "this spice-box is of earth" rather than of heaven. Then, the Spice-box that sanctifies Cohen's book translates the religious symbol into a secular version that marks the personal character of the book. In Allan Roy's words:

> The sacredness of the spice-box that sanctifies the synagogue prior to Sabbath prayers is transplanted by Cohen to sanctify the book containing his personal philosophies and prayers. Cohen does not presume to create a new religion but emphasizes the secular nature of his approach to God by pointing out that his spice-box is of earth rather than of heaven (1967: 55).

Therefore, when Cohen uses his Jewish heritage in *The Spice-Box of Earth,* he is not only alluding to religion but to society, art, and loving relationships. His religiosity becomes secular in constructing his own personal world; so rather than a biblical rhetoric, what the reader finds in *The Spice-Box of Earth* is the rhetoric of the artist, who becomes the centre of the work of art.

In Cohen's secular universe nothing is what it seems and below the apparently simplicity, clarity, and naiveté of Cohen's themes and language, the book suggests a darker and ambivalent meaning, specially in those poems concerned with romantic relationships. Cohen's polished and rhymed verse contrast, then, with the obscure dimension of the volume, where poems are not a mere celebration of love but they include as well suffering and pain. In this sense, Ondaatje referred to *The Spice-Box of Earth* as "far nastier and far more frightening" (1970: 21) than *Flowers for Hitler*, which it is Cohen's third volume of poetry and the book where he explores the notion of cruelty from a social point of view. For the Canadian critic, whereas in *The Spice-Box of Earth*, "there is no possible control (…) it is one's own recurring nightmare" (1978: 21), in *Flowers for Hitler* the evil is social, it is outside the individual and can be controlled.

Nevertheless, despite the darkness of Cohen's second volume, critics did not remove from him the crown of 'the golden boy of Canadian poetry', which he had fairly gained with the publication of his romantic verses in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*. In this regard, the dark poems of this second volume were carefully wrapped with the same delicacy of the former volume, so the traditional form and sensuous language of the poems preserved Cohen's romanticism. However, there were not anymore "romantic deaths as in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, but strange cripples, even though the wounds may not be real" (Ondaatje 1970: 20). Ondaatje considers that *The Spice-Box of Earth* constitutes a progression from the ideas stated in *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, which are almost parodied in Cohen's second volume with his romantic disenchantment, "Cohen's treatment of lush dreamworld is far less romantic and he is careful to undermine flamboyance with bathos (…) He rejects the world of enigmatic heroes" (1970: 16).

Cohen's destruction of the romantic world is substituted by the poet's self-consciousness of his own romanticism, who adopts a romantic pose in the form of parody. *The Spice-Box of Earth* inevitably contains a touch of irony that contributes to the ambivalence of Cohen's second collection: on one hand, Cohen proposes an anti-romantic attitude, whereas on the other hand, he writes perfectly rhymed verses in a simple and beautiful language. The apparently naiveté of the poems is overshadowed by Cohen's irony, so the

style and language of the poems do not always reflect what the artist actually wants to convey.

In fact, the paradox described above is a constant in Cohen's artistic career, where irony and romanticism go hand in hand. This paradox happens again in Cohen's first novel *The Favourite Game*, a book that the Canadian artist started to write at the same time he was finishing *The Spice-Box of Earth.* There are, indeed, several parallelisms between the two works; for example, Cohen does not hesitate to include in his first novel poems from *The Spice-Box of Earth,* which he presents as creations of the protagonist Lawrence Breavman, an alter-ego of Cohen who adopts the same romantic and ironic approach towards loving relationships. Therefore, the novel reproduces some of the situations and attitudes described in Cohen's second volume of poetry, such as the inability of the poet for commitment with his lovers, or the consolation that he finds in artistic beauty once he finds himself away from his mistresses. In Ondaatje's words, "Cohen himself is the twentieth-century troubadour lover who in separation transforms his losses into ethereal images" (1970: 21-22).

The conception of love in *The Spice-Box of Earth* is associated with sexual pleasure rather than spiritual connection; the poet admires the woman's physical beauty, but he does not seem mentally attached to her. Actually, the protagonist of the poems seems to be the artist rather than the women to whom he addresses his art, "the point is *Cohen* is on the pedestal here, not the women, although he is gracious enough to describe them as ideal creatures" (Ondaatje 1970: 20). Therefore, the poet's attitude is to some extent cynical: he does not write poetry to an ethereal and unreachable woman, but to those women which he temporarily possesses but ultimately abandons in favour of his art. The poet cannot stay forever with his lovers since he must depart in order to preserve his artistic powers, so it is precisely this conflict between the lover and the artist figure the one that the young Lawrence Breavman embodies in Cohen's aforementioned novel *The Favourite Game*.

The Spice-Box of Earth introduces, thus, 'the religion of the flesh' in which sexuality is elevated to the category of religion by means of art, a recurrent theme indeed in Cohen's artistic production, specially in his songs.

Therefore, the themes of the poems do not only go hand in hand with Cohen's *Favourite Game* but with the Canadian artist's studio albums as well, in which the pieces of Cohen's second collection of poetry seem imbued by a song-like character noticeable in the perfectly rhymed verses, the musical cadences, and the simple diction of the poems. Furthermore, six poems of the collection include the word 'Song' in their titles, whereas at the same time the book collects many love ballads that remind the readers of the form of the song. It is not surprising, then, that Cohen's fans had turned specially their attention to *The Spice-Box of Earth* rather than to any other of his poetry books, since it is in this volume where the themes and ideas of some of his records emerge. In this sense, some Cohen's songs like "True Love Leaves No Traces", "Hallelujah", and "A Bunch of Lonesome Heroes" are clearly inspired in poems from this collection.

The Spice-Box of Earth contains eighty-eight poems, which are subsequently displayed in the pages of the volume. There is no division in the book but there are three recognizable parts that organise the poems of the collection by topic. The first group corresponds to those pieces that deal with the role of the artist and the act of creation. Cohen explores in them the pleasures and sufferings of writing, as well as he reflects on his identity as an artist. The second and central part of the book gathers the romantic poems, some of them are simple and joyful celebrations of love, but the majority of the poems from this group contain an ironic tone and a sceptical attitude that place Cohen's verses already in the realms of Black Romanticism; a tendency in which he is going to explore the most sordid and obscure aspects of romanticism, but always with a fine and crafted verse. Finally, the third group includes a selection of poems about Cohen's Jewish inheritance, he explores in them his religious background but he dedicates as well some pieces to the artists he admires, such as Van Gogh, Irving Layton, and A.M Klein. The book closes with "Lines from my Grandfather's Journal", a poem inspired by his maternal grandfather in which he adopts almost the form of prose to render homage to his beloved relative.

1.2. The Gears of Creation

The volume opens with one of Cohen's most celebrated poems "A Kite is a Victim". It is a beautifully crafted poem that stands alone only by its musicality and sensuous language. Its simplicity and the cleanliness of its expression makes it enjoyable without reflecting too much on the actual meaning of the verses. Nevertheless, Cohen introduces a conflict in this piece that is going to be present in the rest of the volume, as well as in a great part of the Canadian artist's successive production. In "A Kite is a Victim" there is an unresolved tension between the desire of freedom and the need of control. In the words of Michael Q. Abraham, "the kite is a clear metaphor for the tension between limitation and freedom" (1996). Cohen uses the image of the kite to illustrate this tension, it is "a victim you are sure of" (1999: 8); on one hand, the speaker of the poem likes the feeling of control over the kite, "You love it because it pulls / gentle enough to call you master" (8); but on the other hand, the kite is "strong enough to call you fool" (8). The speaker subsequently compares it with a "desperate trained falcon"; on one side, the falcon is a bird with strong predatory instincts that freely ascends "in the high sweet air", but on the other side, the falcon is "desperate" and "trained", and just as the kite, "you can always haul it down / to tame it in your drawer" (8).

In the next stanza, the speaker compares the kite with a fish "you have already caught". The control that the poet exerts over the fish is almost sadistic, he enjoys his powers despite the suffering that he inflicts on the living creature, "so you play him carefully and long" (8). As Scobie explains, "there is even a hint of the darker side of Cohen's imagination in the sadistic implications of the language" (1978: 26). The same violent impulse is found in the former stanza with the falcon, as well as in the third stanza, in which the speaker controls the poem he has just written,

> but you don't let it go
> until someone finds you
> something else to do (8).

The poem is, thus, another artifact in which the speaker can exert his powers; however, this dynamic of control is interrupted in the fourth and last stanza when the speaker confronts the magnificent nature, “so you make friends with the field / the river and the wind” (10). Under the moon, the poet can only adopt a humble attitude,

> then you pray the whole cold night before,
> under the travelling cordless moon,
> to make you worthy and lyric and pure (10).

Roles are reversed and the poet is not anymore the master of the kite, the falcon, the fish, and the poem; he is instead servile and powerless under the moon. The speaker fails, then, in his games of control. In Scobie's words,

> But this game -the game of being in control, of winning- is not finally a satisfactory one. As the 'other' increases in intensity and purity it finally breaks free, the cordless moon; the roles are reversed; the commanding self is now the victim praying to be worthy, is now the beautiful loser (1978: 27).

The dynamics of control are unsatisfactory, but there is no moralizing or didactic purpose in the poem. In fact, 'the other' -the kite, falcon, fish, and poem- continues to be subordinated to the poet since the speaker has made “a contract of glory” with nature. Cohen leaves the tension between control and freedom unresolved, it is an ambivalent poem where the poet acts both as “a teacher (a “master”) and a clown (a “fool”)” (Deshaye 2009: 84). On the other hand, the kite of the poem is a complex image with different meanings and levels of expression. As Scobie explains,

> like all good images, it exists first of all at the literal level, as itself: this is an excellent poem about kite-flying. But precisely because Cohen has been true to the emotional integrity of this level, the image is able to expand onto other levels as well, at least one of which -kite as poem- is explicitly mentioned (1978: 27).

The kite can be literally interpreted as an artifact to play with, but at the same time it is a symbol from which other meanings emanate, such as the one of the poem that is "worthy and lyric and pure" (Cohen 1999: 10); in this regard, for Joel Deshaye, "'a Kite is a Victim' is in some ways Cohen's 'last poem' to embody those values" (2009: 85). Scobie suggests other possible meanings such as the one of the figure of the lover, in this regard, in all loving relationships exist always tensions that can be associated with the ones that the kite suffers in the poem; furthermore, many of Cohen's poems and songs approach loving relationships as games of control and power, so it is not unreasonable to think that the Canadian poet uses the symbology of the kite to write again about love. Nevertheless, other critics like Ondaatje view Cohen's kite in more general terms and believe that it is "symbolic of our ego and ambitions, of all that is original and free in us" (1970: 16). The Canadian poet contrasts the image of the kite -and thus of the poem, falcon, etc.- with the one of the "cordless" moon, an entity that cannot be dominated by men unlike the rest of items of the poem. It is possible, then, to view the kite as the symbol of all those items that were original and free in the beginning, but ultimately were subjected by the need of the human ego to control and impose power relationships over nature, just as the artist does with the poem.

It is clear that with "A Kite is a Victim" Cohen introduces the group of poems of *The Spice-Box of Earth* that deal with the role and the powers of the artist. In the same fashion, Cohen's second poem of the collection -"After the Sabbath Prayers"- reflects over these questions and introduces the ruthless part of creation by means of the religious heritage of the poet, in which the Sabbath is the day of rest and worship in Judaism, as well as the Baal Shem

of the poem refers to the historical occupation of kabbalistic rabbis who performed miracles, healing, exorcisms, etc. According to Abraham, the poem inherits "the Hebraic romanticism (…) and the mourning melancholy of Klein" (1996); but the religious atmosphere in the poem and the influence of A.M Klein is overtly used to speak about the artist as a loser.

The poem is composed of two stanzas that capture two different moments in the artist's process of creation. In the first stanza, the poet undertakes a miraculous flight toward creation in the form of "the Baal Shem's butterfly" -probably the Baal Shem alludes specifically to the figure of Baal Shem Tov, a Jewish mystical rabbi died in 1760, who was known as 'The Good Master of the Name' and earned his good reputation as healer of the community-. The poet specifies that "Now the Baal Shem is dead / These hundreds of years" (Cohen 1999: 12), but the butterfly miraculously resists:

> So this was a miracle,
> Dancing down all these wars and truces
> Yellow as a first-day butterfly,
> Nothing of time or massacre
> In its bright flutter (12).

In Ondaatje's view, the flight of the butterfly resembles the presence of the moon in "A Kite is a Victim", since they both represent the perfect state for the poet. However, the flight of the butterfly is brief, so when it ends it can only be accompanied "with the depression that comes with the return to the banal world" (1970: 16). The second stanza of the poem represents, then, the return to the banal world, which for Scobie implies "the dejection of the poet in his 'loser' role" (1978: 30). When the prayers of the Sabbath end, the creature already appears "Folded somewhere on a sticky leaf / And moving like a leaf itself" (12). The butterfly -the creative impulse- has lost its vivacity and does not flight anymore, so the poet tries to find consolation in the greatness of the past, "A miracle this is, that I, / Who this morning saw the Baal Shem's butterfly" (12). The sunny and bright atmosphere of the first

stanza turns into cold and darkness in the second part of the poem. The poet finds himself under the "sharp stars", the wind is ungrateful with him and the butterfly, so he finds no more refuge than "Hands in pocketed against the flies and cold" (12). As in "A Kite is a Victim", Cohen neither resolves the contrast between the two stanzas nor gives a didactic tone to the poem. He merely presents as a fact the decline of the artist and his powers.

On the contrary, "The Flowers That I Left in the Ground" is a poem apparently constructed around the idea of "beauty growing out of death and decay" (Scobie 1978: 28). The poet seems confident and capable of making "the dying world eternal" (Ondaatje 1970: 16) in the first three stanzas of the poem:

> The flowers that I left in the ground,
> that I did not gather for you,
> today I bring them all back
> to let them grow forever,
> not in poems or marble,
> but where they fell and rotted
>
> And the ships in the great stalls.
> huge and transitory as heroes,
> ships I could not captain,
> today I bring them back
> to let them sail forever,
> not in model or ballad,
> but where they were wrecked and scuttled.
>
> And the child on whose shoulders I stand,
> whose longing I purged
> with public, kingly discipline,
> today I bring him back
> to languish forever,
> not in confession or biography,
> but where he flourished,
> growing sly and hairy (16).

However, the heroic tone and the control that the speaker executes over his environment in the first half part of the poem is suddenly destructed in the fourth stanza by the poet's criticism over his own work. He claims to be "the expert of the catalogue", who uses the same old words to describe his beloved, "Gold, ivory, flesh, love, God, blood, moon" (18). In fact, he recognizes that his lover does not belong to him, "Who owns anything that he has not made?" (18). In this sense, he loses the former control in recognizing the vacuity of his job, in which he can only provide words for a beauty that does not involve him, "With your beauty I am as uninvolved / as with horses' manes and waterfalls" (18). Therefore, as in "After the Sabbath Prayers", the poet's capacities change in the middle of the poem and he ends being ultimately a loser incapable of creating beauty. Nevertheless, other poems of the collection deal with the role of the poet as master and controller, such as it happens in "If it were Spring", a piece in which Cohen plays again with the idea of creating beauty out of what is dead. However, the speaker goes a step further in this poem and contemplates the idea of killing for the sake of his art. In Abraham's words, "the poet does not remember death through his poetry, but causes death for his poetry" (1996). The poet murders for artistic aims:

> If it were Spring
> and I killed a man,
> I would change him to leaves
> and hang him from a tree (20).

The next four stanzas of the poem explore the beauty that the poet is capable of creating out of the murdered man in collaboration with nature. The dead body is transformed into something poetic:

Wind would make him
part of song,
and rain would cling
like tiny crystal worlds
upon his branch
of leaf-green skies (20).

The fact that the poet needs to murder a man to compose a beautiful poem is at least shocking, so Cohen is already warning the reader about the strong satirical implication of "If it were a Spring", in which suffering and death become sources for inspiration. The controversy of this premise, which is contrary to the common belief that poets write for "bringing things to life" (Scobie 1978: 28) makes the reader -and the writer as well- to question the nature of art and its "potential deception" (Abraham 1996). Therefore, the reader and the writer reflect on the point of turning barbarity into beauty, as well as murder into mercy by means of artistic freedom. This reflection brings again the creative tension depicted in "A Kite is a Victim" between control and freedom, so in Abraham's words, "Once again, it is the tension between silence and voice, between complete control and unbridled freedom, that emerges as the essence of art" (1996). The man of the poem is an artifact similar, thus, to the kite of "A Kite is Victim"; they are both victims of the power of the poet, who confronts his creative process by asserting his sadistic control over them. The man of the poem is, "O my victim / you would grow your season" (22), as well as "an instrument / of the blue sky" (22). The poet offers his victim to the artistic community, who waits with "the pens raised, walls prepared, / hands hung above the strings and keys" (22); he even gives precise details of his wicked actions:

And come Autumn
I will spin a net
between your height and earth
to hold your crisp parts (23).

Nevertheless, there is an important difference between "A Kite is a Victim" and "If it were Spring"; whereas in the first poem the "controlling moon" removes from the poet his powers in the final stanza, the speaker of "It were Spring" asserts his dominant position. In Scobie's words, "the poem asserts the poet's complete power and control over this process: the final stanza rings out with the assertions of his supremacy" (1978: 28):

> I will kill a man this week;
> before this week is gone
> I will hang him to a tree,
> I will see this mercy done (24)

Furthermore, the poet in "If it were Spring" is the one that at the end of the poem ironically gives mercy with murder, since he transforms this act into something worthy of poetical attention; as Ondaatje suggests, "the artist has made it part of a legend, has given death style" (1970: 17). In fact, it emerges a new language with the death of the man that is capable of explaining anguish and relieving sorrow:

> What language of the city will hear
> because of your death,
> anguish explain,
> sorrow relieve (22).

The death of the man has turned, then, into something positive; it is a new language of mercy inflicted by the poet, who has become an active murderer that claims, "I will see this mercy done" (22). This attitude of the poet towards death contrasts with the one that he adopts in the next poem of the collection "There are Some Men". From the murderer role of "If it were Spring", the poet appears as a mourning witness, he chants in an elegiac tone the death of a close friend. The poet abandons his role as master in

order to honour the memory of a friend by naming a mountain after him. However, as Scobie suggests, the poet does not completely get rid of his position of master, he shows instead the "quietest and most dignified expression" (1978: 28) of it. In this regard, it still exists the poet's impulse for control and domination, but this time it acquires a milder and tender tone with his desire to provide "a subtle requiem in the place of an unjust silence" (Abraham 1996). Even if the poet seems more concerned with his capacity to name a mountain rather than to chant the virtues of his deceased friend, the poem begins as an obituary for some men "who should have mountains / to bear their names to time" (26), since "Grave-makers are not high enough / or green" (26) for them. Among this great men stands Cohen's friend, whose virtues are enumerated in the third stanza of the poem:

> I had a friend:
> he lived and died in mighty silence
> and with dignity,
> left no book, son, or lover to mourn (26).

The name of the friend to whom the poet renders homage is never revealed. Deshaye has speculated with the identity of the poet's friend, whom the critic believes to be Cohen's father; but on the other hand, Deshaye suggests that the poem might be addressed as well to the poet Irving Layton, to whom Cohen renders homage in the first lines by paralleling the opening image of Layton's poem "My Eyes are Wide Open", in which the speaker describes a "rising son" who grows in strength while he inevitably ages. In this sense, Cohen responds in his poem as the "rising son" of his old mentor.

Nevertheless, whether the poem is addressed to Cohen's father or to Irving Layton, the poet makes use of his most generous powers to equate the elegized man with a monument capable of facing "the void of mortality" (Abraham 1996). However, the poet wants to distance himself from the romanticism of elegies and 'mourning-songs', so in the fourth and last stanza

he concludes with:

> Nor is this a mourning-song
> but only a naming of this mountain
> on which I walk,
> fragrant, dark, and softly white
> under the pale of mist.
> I name this mountain after him (26).

The same refusal of romantic values occurs in "I Have not Lingered in European Monasteries", one of the most anthologized poems of the collection, in which the speaker rejects the attributes and the role of the Romantic poet. The poem presents different images in the first four stanzas associated with the sources of inspiration of the romantics, such as "European monasteries", or "(...) those great distances / between the snowy mountains and the fisherman" (56). In the third stanza, the poet recognizes how he has "not held my breath / so that I might hear the breathing of God" (56), as well as he has:

> (...) not become the heron,
> leaving my body on the shore,
> and I have not become the luminous trout,
> leaving my body in the air (56).

The poet, thus, is not only rejecting traditional and romantic values; he is in fact enumerating in an almost nostalgic tone all those experiences that he has not accomplished, in Abraham's words, "Essentially, the poem is a catalogue of renunciation. The speaker describes in eloquent detail everything he has not accomplished" (1996). Therefore, the poet's renunciation of the romantic universe is actually ironic, since he longs for the same things that he affirms to refuse, so for Scobie, "the poem contrives to

mean the opposite of what it says" (1978: 30). The poet's desire for the same romantic images that he rejects becomes evident in the fifth and last stanza, in which the speaker changes the tone and closes the poem with conventional and plain experiences that contrast with the beauty and magical inspiration of the former stanzas. In this last stanza, the image that the poet depicts is "of insipid happiness, seemingly content but devoid of exhilaration" (Abraham 1996). He merely laughs, sleeps, eats his favourite meals, cleans his body, and works:

> I have not been unhappy for ten thousand years.
> During the day I laugh and during the night I sleep.
> My favourite cooks prepare my meals,
> my body cleans and repairs itself,
> and all my work goes well (58).

It is clear now the relationship between the anti-poetic tone that Cohen adopts in "I Have not Lingered in European Monasteries" with the negation of the romantic world that he longs for. The same tone is found in other poems of the collection such as "I Wonder How Many People in This City", in which the poet reflects on the role of the artist with both irony and seriousness. The poet of "I Wonder How Many People in This City" is in a

> favoured role as loser, gazing in his loneliness out of the window at all the other losers whose only consolation is to turn away, go back to their desks, and write the same poem, about all the other lonely losers whose only consolation .. etc., in a circle of futility (Scobie 1978: 29).

The speaker of the poem is conscious, then, of the futility of his activity, which is nothing else than the consolation that all loners and losers practice at their desks in the night. Another poem that reflects on the uselessness of poetry is "Gift", in which the poet ironically notices that "whatever he says

will be accepted as a poem; even silence may be" (Scobie 1978: 29); however, the only way to defeat silence and loneliness is by means of words and poetry, so again the poem contains an ironic and paradoxical tone.

A paradox is what the reader finds in "The Cuckold's Song", a poem that pretends to not to be a poem:

> If this looks like a poem
> I might as well warn you at the beginning
> that it's not meant to be one.
> I don't want to turn anything into poetry (100).

The first verse of the poem presents already Cohen's anti-poetic pose, but the poet's following verses in which he carefully displays his bitterness for the betrayal of his lover makes it very difficult for the reader to believe in his anti-poetic statement. The poet cleverly modulates the material of the poem and turns angry into "wit and self-mockery" (Pacey 1967: 8). He uses a colloquial language that contrasts with the lyricism of the rest of the volume, but this change of style does not affect the ironical and paradoxical connotations of "The Cuckold's Song", which it is indeed a good poem despite the speaker's desires in the first lines. The poem illustrates, in fact, as Pacey wrote, "Cohen's versatility of both matter and manner" (1967: 8), so even if Cohen changes the style, he manages to create a poetic form that at least questions his anti-poetic intentions. As Scobie wrote, "The role of the anti-poet can never be anything other than a paradoxical one; a poem attacking poetry is always less successful in its aim the more successful in its execution" (1978: 29). The poem stands too as an example of the self-consciousness of the poet in the act of creation. Cohen decides to include himself as an actor in the lines of "The Cuckold's song": "I repeat: the important thing was to cuckold Leonard Cohen" (100). In this regard, he uses constantly his figure in his works "exploding with ironies his role as the poet writing a lover's complaint" (Ondaatje 1970: 17):

Personally I don't give a damn who led who on
in fact I wonder if I give a damn at all
But a man's got to say something (100).

In this sense, Cohen already introduces in *The Spice-Box of Earth* the mask of the anti-poet that is going to be the protagonist of many of the Canadian artist's following books; the poet is the main participant of the action in the piece; he mocks his injured state with both cynicism and humour, but at the same time he addresses at the end to the woman that has betrayed him and he claims:

The fact is I'm turning to gold, turning to gold.
It's a long process, they say,
it happens in stages.
This is to inform you that I've already turned to clay (102).

This "turning into clay" already contains and announces some of the black romantic echoes from Cohen's love poems in *The Spice-Box of Earth* explored in the next section -'The Dark Side of Love'- of this dissertation.

1.3. The Dark Side of Love

The love poems belong to the second thematic group of the collection located mainly in the central part of the volume. As aforementioned, there are two types of romantic poetry in *The Spice-Box of Earth* -those poems which simply confirm love with conventional and healthy relationships, and those others that question the notion of the ideal love, so they include personal obsessions, doubts and uncertainties, etc.-. This last type of poetry makes of Cohen, according to Sandra Djawa in her article "Leonard Cohen: a Black Romantic", a 'Black Romantic' writer in the same artistic tradition of

Baudelaire, Rimbaud, or Genet. Therefore, Cohen seems to find a place in this tradition led by the marginalized and revolutionists -it started with De Sade's narrations, it continued with the writings of French poets, and it led to the new sounds of Beat writers like Allan Ginsberg or William Burroughs.

Whereas the Romantic artist prevails feeling over intellect, so she or he rejects the rational world in order to explore what it is natural and uncivilized; the Black Romantic takes this premise to extremes, so she or he celebrates the darkest aspects of the non-rational experience, such as the experimentation with drugs, sexuality in its most violent and cruel terms, as well as other types of personal domination that alienate the individual from conventional society.

In *The Spice-Box of Earth,* there are poems that introduce these darker aspects with relationships of personal domination, such as the ones of master and slave, victor and victim, and saint and discipline. The poems include images of violence and cruelty that contribute to the dark atmosphere of the volume. For example, in "I Have Two Bars of Soap", the poet offers exotic gifts to his beloved at the expense of crime and murder, "I have no money, / I murdered the perfumer" (124). In "Morning Song", as Scobie wrote, "we find, not a joyful aubade, but a nightmare image of disfigurement" (1978: 34), so instead of the celebratory and innocent overtones that the title "Morning Song" suggests, what the reader actually finds is a strange and frighting nightmare of mutilation:

> She dreamed the doctors arrived
> And severed her legs at the knee.
> This she dreamed on a morning
> Of a night she slept beside me (104).

The dynamics of domination in personal relationships are at the core of poems like "The Girl Toy". The title suggests the poet's control over a depersonalised woman who serves him as sexual toy, but in fact the ultimate meaning of the poem suggests the domination of machinery over

humankind. The girl of the poem is a sex machine devoid of face and personality, so her perfection makes her to lead the dominant role in the poem over an “obese and old” king. Whereas he “fell and wept and spit up blood” (112), she preserves her beauty “lovely as a pendulum”; with her perfection she makes the king suffer, but “He didn't care if sometimes he tasted gold in her mouth / or cut his ageing lips on a jewelled eye” (112). The Girl Toy is then not only beautiful but cruel, she reminds indeed of Cohen's latter fascination with mechanics in both of his novels, specially in *Beautiful Losers* with the presence of a 'Danish Vibrator' and an 'ordinary eternal machinery'.

The poem echoes as well Cohen's admiration towards the English poet John Keats -who will later reappear in his fiction- since there are “famous golden birds” and “hammered figures” that remind of Keat's “Sailing to Byzantium” (1928). This opening allusion to Yeats suggests that “the girl toy may also be taken as an image of art: the impersonal, perfect, eternal machine to which the king, like Breavman, devotes himself” (Scobie 1978: 35). In this sense, the machine may stand -just as it happens with art- as a sort of eternal consolation that challenges the fragility and mortality of men; these latter conditions are both embodied in the King's physical decay. In Ondaatje's words, the Girl Toy is, thus, a “machine bride (…) that becomes a contemporary version of Rider Haggard's Ayesha staying eternal while her husband and the world around her rots” (1970: 22). If in *Ayesha* (1905) Muhammad's wife stays beautiful and eternal, the sexual machine of “The Girl Toy” preserves this allure too; nevertheless, this beauty is linked in the poem with cruelty, merciless thoughts, and a fear that suggests domination, so Cohen's attitude is ambivalent again: on one hand, he praises the machine's timelessness in art, but on the other hand, he shows its ruthless and controlling nature.

Dark atmospheres and images of suffering are displayed in “Credo”, a poem that juxtaposes the act of love-making with episodes of terror and violence. “Credo” goes back to ancient Egypt to resume the grasshopper plague inflicted by God to punish the Pharaoh for the enslavement of the Hebrew. In this “cloud of grasshoppers” and destruction, where farms are devoured and pyramids overturned, a couple makes love:

Later, clusters of fern apart,
we lay.
A cloud of grasshoppers
passed between is and the moon,
(…) The smell that burning cities give
was in the air (64).

The poet wonders about the possibility of leaving her lover and join the Hebrew when the Egypt's chaos bursts; however, the act of love-making appears to be more important than the destruction of Egypt and the Hebraic exodus, so he prefers to stay close to her beloved in "the small oasis where we lie" (66). The oasis represents, then, the poet's choice for "the ordinary morning lust", i.e., the safety and commodity of their loving relationship prevails over the ruined city of Egypt. Therefore, the poet in "Credo" opts for the activity of love as a form of distraction in front of the violence that surrounds him, or perhaps, as Scobie wrote, "it is a culmination of that violence" (1978: 35). Ambivalence reigns in "Credo" again, so the reader at the end is not sure whether the poet rests in his "oasis of lust", or on the contrary, he engages in the most violent of the activities.

A central poem of *The Spice Box of Earth* is "You Have the Lovers", a piece almost written in prose that introduces the themes that Cohen later resumes in his second novel *Beautiful Losers.* These themes are at the core of Cohen's production, they reflect mainly on the dynamics of power that emerge in the relationships between saints and disciplines, as well as they project a new understanding of religion as a discipline to be learned. In this new dimension of religion, sexuality plays an important role, as shown in "You Have the Lovers" with the love-making of a couple, or as depicted in many other Cohen's works with the union of sexuality and religion as a necessary premise for sainthood.

In "You Have the Lovers", the poet describes a sexual encounter between two lovers; the speaker is an observer of the act that writes down in almost

scientific terms what love demands:

> You have the lovers,
> they are nameless, their histories only for each other,
> and you have the room, the bed and the windows.
> Pretend it is a ritual (72).

The poet compares, then, the act of love with a ritual in which participants are depersonalised, "they are nameless, their histories only for each other" (72), so the personal history and peculiarities of the lovers are not relevant, instead it is the ritual of love-making what matters. As Scobie explained, "A ritual is a formalized ceremony in which the personalities of those taking part are made transparent to the will of the impersonal process" (1978: 36), so the lovers can only be defined by their function, "they are lovers, those who love" (Scobie 1978: 36). The game of love turns into something private and sacred,

> No one dares disturb them.
> Visitors in the corridor tip-toe past the long closed door,
> they listen for sounds, for a moan, for a song (72).

There is not any sign of the lover's activity in the social world,

> nothing is heard, not even breathing.
> You know they are not dead,
> You can feel the presence of their intense love (72).

The experience is close to the one of death; if Thanatos -death drive- complements Eros -drive to survive- in the post-Freudian thought, there are

many metaphors and puns in the poem, indeed, that linked both experiences, “Unfurl the bed, bury the lovers, blacken the windows” (72). Nevertheless, one day the door of the lover's room is opened and the observer notices how the space has turned into “(...) a dense garden, / full of colours, smells, sounds you have never known” (72). The poet employs from now on an elaborated and precious lexicon that celebrates the act of love “with such hypnotic tenderness” (Pacey 1967: 7); in fact, the bed of the lovers has become as “smooth as a wafer of sunlight” (72). The sexual act becomes, then, not only a momentary loss of the self but “a paradigm of a mystical epiphany” (Pacey 1967: 7), in which sexual fulfilment sets the individual free and connects him with the rest of the universe. The love-making contrasts with the outside world, which remains mundane and transitory, so the observer wants to identify himself with the lovers and to become a part of their ritual:

> You stand beside the bed, weeping with happiness,
> You carefully peel away the sheets
> from the slow-moving bodies.
> Your eyes are filled with tears, you barely make out the lovers (74).

With the personal pronoun 'you', the observer becomes an active participant in the poem, it is in fact, as Scobie wrote, “a generalizing 'you' (…) the discipline, the one who watches over the lovers and who must eventually join them” (1978: 37). The discipline of the poem is the observer, the 'you' that ultimately becomes subjugated to the relationship of power that exists between the saint -the lovers- and the discipline. The personal relationship goes beyond the couple and includes, then, the discipline as a third element, so in the poem -as well as in many Cohen's artistic works- “two are never enough; his rituals keep on demanding mire people. With two, the ego and the individual personality are still too clearly involved: with greater numbers, these things can be lost” (Scobie 1978: 37).

The involvement of a third part in a loving relationship finds its greatest

example on Cohen's novel *Beautiful Losers*, in which three intimate friends fight for the dissolution of their egos and individuality in order to merge with the universe. In "You Have the Lovers", the protagonist couple achieves this aim by means of sexual union, so the poem alludes to the physical sensations of the lovers, "Their lips are bruised with new and old bruises. / Her hair and his beard are hopelessly tangled" (74). Their experience becomes interchangeable:

> When he puts his mouth against her shoulder
> she is uncertain whether her shoulder
> has given or received the kiss.
> All her flesh is like a mouth.
> He carries his fingers along her waist
> and feels his own waist caressed.
> She holds him closer and his own arms tighten around her.
> She kisses the hand beside her mouth.
> It is his hand or her hand, it hardly matters,
> there are so many more kisses (74).

There are no barriers between the lovers, they have merged into each other by forgetting their individuality and personal history; but in this perfect union, the third part of the poem needs to mingle with them in order to achieve sainthood, so at the end the observer manages to get rid of the individuality that inflicts on him "a moment of pain or doubt", and he successfully "recovers the flesh":

> As you undress you sing out, and your voice is magnificent
> because now you believe it is the first human voice
> heard in that room.
> The garments you let fall grow into vines.
> You climb into bed and recover the flesh.
> You close your eyes and allow them to be sewn shut.

You create an embrace and fall into it.
There is only one moment of pain or doubt (74).

The discipline achieves his sainthood at the end by embracing the lovers, but this process is not always as uncomplicated as in "You Have the Lovers", in fact, as Scobie wrote:

> The discipline's transition into union with the saints is easy and smooth; but Cohen was to come to realize that so radical departure from normal human values could not always be achieved so easily. In *Beautiful Losers,* that 'one moment of pain or doubt' is extended throughout the whole novel: it is I's complete course in F.'s 'classroom of hysteria'" (1978: 39).

Therefore, what for Scobie lacks in this poem is the sense of pain, the difficult experience of becoming a saint as depicted in *Beautiful Losers*. Nevertheless, the poem undoubtedly settles the basis for Cohen's latter themes, in which the relationship between the saint and discipline is extended to different forms, such as the one of master and slave, as well as to the one of teacher and pupil, but always with the concepts of love and sexuality as common threads.

In the poem "Song", the speaker certifies the superiority of the carnal desire over "saintly stories". There is a conflict between the moral and the flesh in which the saint man dismisses "each body rare", but the poet leads instead his

(...) eyes to where
The naked girls with silver combs
Are combing out their hair" (142).

The poet feels subjugated, then, to the demands of the flesh, so his final

choice in this moral dilemma at the end is "(...) the mortal ring / Of flesh on flesh in dark" (142) instead of the stories of saints. As Ondaatje explained, "flesh overpowers the formal moralities" (1970: 22), so the poet's morals are controlled here by his sexual drive. In his following works, specially again in *Beautiful Losers*, Cohen removes the conflict between morals and sexuality, since it is precisely the saint the one who prioritizes sexuality as the centre of experience.

Another different type of conflict is present in the poem "Travel", in which the speaker doubts whether to remain with his lover or to leave her in order to start a journey of artistic self-discovery. At the beginning, the poet expresses his doubts about remaining "flesh to flesh" with the woman he loves, so he imagines himself "(...) travelling penniless to some mud throne" (122), then, he might find a master that could instruct him how "to love alone" far away from suffering and pain. In the second stanza, he reaffirms himself in the intention of leaving his lover; he makes indeed a direct statement:

> Lost in the fields of your hair I was never lost
> Enough to lose a way I had to take;
> Breathless beside your body I could not exhaust
> The will that forbid me contract, vow,
> Or promise, and often while you slept
> I looked in awe beyond your beauty (122).

This resolution echoes the one that Cohen's protagonist makes in *The Favourite Game* about his lover Shell, whom he finally abandons in favour of his art. The poet views his resolution as both inevitable and necessary, but in the third stanza, he recognizes the painful consequences and difficulties of his journey:

> Now

I know why many men have stopped and wept
Half-way between the loves they leave and seek,
And wondered if travel leads them anywhere -
Horizons keep the soft line of your cheek,
The windy sky's a locket for your hair (122).

Furthermore, as Scobie suggests, the third stanza of the poem "introduces the element of doubt, the question of whether 'travel leads (…) anywhere'" (1978: 33). Scobie arguments that it is not clear whether the poet decided or not to leave his lover. In this sense, the speaker's resolution is ambiguous due to the beauty of the last two verses, "Horizons keep the soft line of your cheek, / The windy sky's a locket for your hair" (122), which might have made the poet to reconsider his decision of leaving his beloved.

Nevertheless, the last two verses of the poem might be interpreted as well a sublimation of what the poet renounced to, so he turns into art what he painfully lost. In this regard, Ondaatje explains how "Cohen's consolation for loss usually comes in his continuing fascination with the power of translating raw beauty into metaphors" (1970: 21). He decides, thus, to transform the memories of her lover into beautiful images, just as the protagonist of *The Favourite Game* does with Shell. This last interpretation by Ondaatje coincides with Cohen's life in art, in which the poet cannot be confined or tied to a particular person, he must travel and follow his path whether it is right or wrong. And it is precisely this uncertainty about travelling that marks Cohen's earlier work, in which there is a "neurotic limbo, the world 'half-way between' repressive guilt and aggressive ambition" (Abraham 1996). On one side, the "repressive guilt" arises with Cohen's difficulty for leaving his beloved, whereas the aggressive ambition comes from his decision to preserve his art over his personal satisfaction. Both positions are extremes, so there is an unavoidable tension between them that it is reflected on the poem "Travel", in which the poet starts questioning himself at the beginning if he can learn to "love alone", but at the end he seems actually trapped by the nature of love itself, which always demands more than one person for fulfilment.

The poem "Owning Everything" reflects on the same conflict of "Travel", but in this new piece the speaker decides to remain beside the lover instead of undertaking the journey. The poem starts with a romantic and almost epic tone that guarantees the rendition of the poet towards his beloved:

> For your sake I said I will praise the moon,
> tell the colour of the river,
> find new words for the agony
> and ecstasy of gulls (84).

The first stanzas of the poem capture the harmony and fulfilment that the speaker feels about being in love:

> Because you are close,
> everything that men make, observe
> or plant is close, is mine:
> the gulls slowly writhing, slowly singing
> on the spears of wind;
> the iron gate above the river;
> the bridge holding between stone fingers
> her cold bright necklace of pearls (84).

The poet is connected, then, with his environment. He seems to be the owner of nature and of a deep feeling of wholeness that surrounds him when his beloved stands close to him; thus, what the speaker seeks is the physical encounter with her, instead of the separation that could guarantee him a "private love" with "the root and gull and stone" (84). Nevertheless, the harmony he feels is always temporarily, so in the last two stanzas there is a slight tone of regret that challenges the calm of his secure relationship. The poet suggests how he cannot embrace or have a "private love" with the rest of the world,

and because I sleep so near to you
I cannot embrace
or have my private love with them (86).

In fact, he admits that he does not travel because he has "nowhere to go". It seems with these last stanzas that the poet misses to some extent the wandering of the lonely traveller, in Scobie's words,

> Breavman, and Cohen, are not at all sure that they *want* to be robbed of their strangerhood; they see it as a necessary condition for their art, the 'embrace' and 'private love' from which this secure relationship is cutting them off (1978: 32).

Thus, despite the feeling of comfort, peace and harmony that the loving relationships provides to the poet, he shows at the end ambivalence towards this security. Nonetheless, he seems to accept with stoicism, at least in this poem, his "loss of strangerhood" (Scobie 1978: 32) in favour of his continuing relationship:

You worry that I will leave you.
I will not leave you.
Only strangers travel.
Owning everything,
I have nowhere to go (86).

Both "Travel" and "Owning Everything" are poems close in tone to the questions that Breavman asks himself in *The Favourite Game,* but there are indeed two other poems in *The Spice-Box of Earth* intimately linked with

Cohen's first novel. These poems are "Beneath My Hands", a piece which Cohen addresses to Shell in the novel and uses it to describe Breavman's creative process of writing, and "As the Mist Leaves No Scar", which appears as the epigraph of the book. This last poem serves as the epigraph of the novel due to the imagery of scars that both works carry, but it echoes as well some of the themes that the book deals with. Nevertheless, the poem has a meaning of its own and it is one of the most applauded pieces of *The Spice-Box of Earth* due to its complexity and formal beauty; then, it is not surprising that Cohen later retrieves it in *The Favourite Game,* a novel as aforementioned closely connected in themes and attitude with this second volume of poetry. The poem is composed of three stanzas different in tone, it opens with a beautiful and peaceful image limpid of scars:

> As the mist leaves no scar
> On the dark green hill,
> So my body leaves no scar
> On you, nor ever will (130).

Just as the mist leaves no scars on the hill, nor does the poet on his lover. However, these innocent verses probably hide a sense of detachment, "of non-involvement" (Scobie 1978: 34) that might imply -specially with the categorical "nor ever will"- the end of a loving relationship. The tone of the poem gets rougher in the second stanza with the disturbing encounter between the "wind" and the "hawk", elements which both belong to a harsher imagery that contrasts with the harmony of the mist and the hill in the first stanza. There is a deceptive tone when the poets asks himself, "What remains to keep?" from the encounter of the lovers, and the answer seems to be "Then turn, then fall to sleep" (130).

By the third stanza, it seems clear that the love relationship has come to an end. The verb "endure" suggests grief and satiety, but at the same time, it contains overtones of permanence and resistance that might imply the continuity of the relationship. In Scobie's words, "the verb 'endure' is more

ambiguous, at least allowing for the possibility of the couple enduring together (emotionally if not physically) rather than enduring apart, as solitary beings" (1978: 34). Therefore, it is not clear whether the relationship continues or not, however, the categorical last verse of the poem, "When one is gone and far" (130), along with the harshness of the second stanza suggest the final separation and painful break-up. The poem contains, thus, lasting scars that contradict the first verses, so as Ondaatje wrote, "the fatalistic outlook is hidden by a form suggestive of innocence" (1970: 20); and it is precisely this atmosphere of innocence what makes the poem graver than what it looks at a first glance.

This grave tone is what Cohen wanted to achieve with his poems, as he himself recognized, "I want to read and write poems filled with terror and music that change laws and lives. This isn't one of them. But it has stuck with me long enough, like a lucky stone, to suggest that it's true" (as cited in Roy 1967: 47). These lines do not refer to the former poem "As the Mist Leaves No Scar" but to "For Anne", a piece included as well in *The Spice-Box of Earth*. The poem selected by Cohen as his favourite one among the collection is, indeed, a tender ode to his lover rather than a frighting piece filled with terror. Cohen wrote "For Anne" inspired by his lover Georgianna Sherman, the young woman he met at Columbia University that would later serve him as inspiration for the character of Shell in *The Favourite Game.*

As it has been mentioned before, Cohen's works usually present a balance between irony and romanticism; however, critics do not agree to what extent irony is present in "For Anne". For Scobie the poem works "because of its absolute simplicity and lucidity" (1978: 31), it is a simple but beautiful poem that does not want to address anything else than the poet's romantic loss, so the poem is not moving at an intellectual level but at an emotional one. Nonetheless, for Ondaatje "For Anne" brings perfectly together Cohen's irony and romance, "It is only in the lyrics where he is able to inject just the smallest touch of irony and self-consciousness of himself as a romantic, aware of his pose, that he is completely successful" (1970: 19). However, whether the poem contains irony or not, it stands as one of the purest ballads of the collection in which the conventionality of the love lyric does not annihilate the beauty of Cohen's verses.

1.4. The Weight of Tradition

The third and last part of *The Spice-Box of Earth* gathers those poems concerned with Cohen's Jewish inheritance. Some of the poems of this group are dedicated to other artists and poets, such as the ones addressed to A.M Klein and Irving Layton, both Jewish poets of the Montreal community that greatly influenced Cohen.

In "Last Dance at the Four Penny", the poet finds himself dancing a freilach -a Jewish dance- with Irving Layton, whom he calls "Layton, my friend Lazarovitch". The title of the poem alludes to the art gallery called 'The Four Penny' that Cohen briefly co-managed with his friend the sculptor Morton Rosengarten in Montreal. Furthermore, the title also specifies that the dance in which Cohen and Layton are engaged is the last one, so for Abraham (1996), the poem shows already Cohen's "movement" away from his Jewish influences. Nevertheless, the dance seems at the beginning a progressive flight, as shown in the celebratory tone in which the speaker addresses his friend and he claims:

> Layton, my friend Lazarovitch,
> no Jew was ever lost
> while we two dance joyously
> in this French province (148).

They both embrace joyously their tradition, "resurrecting ancient rabbis and revelling in delicious quarrels about the sound of the Ineffable Name" (Abraham 1996). But in the middle of the dance the poet recognizes how his Jewish inheritance lacks relevance, so it is not important anymore whether or not "the Messiah is a Litvak", i.e., a Jew with Lithuanian roots:

> Reb Israel Lazarovitch,
> you no-good Romanian, you're right!

Who cares whether or not
the Messiah is a Litvak? (148-150).

The question addressed to Layton, whom he calls this time "Reb Israel Lazarovitch" is "especially poignant because Layton himself indulged occasionally in a Messianic persona" (Deshaye 2009: 85). But the poem goes beyond and ultimately sets Cohen and Layton out of the Jewish tradition: the last verses inevitably announce the end of the "freilachs", "we who dance so beautifully / though we know that freilachs end" (150). Therefore, as Deshaye explained, "Cohen is preparing himself — and Layton — for a "poetic departure" that would reduce the Jewish aspect of his image and help to make him appear more secular — a "pop-saint," yes, but with the emphasis on "pop" (2009: 85). In this regard, Cohen is probably announcing with this poem the move he made with *The Spice-Box of Earth* from the Jewish influence that marked his first volume of poetry towards the more defiant position that sets his latter works in the realms of pop culture.

After reading "Last Dance at the Four Penny", the next poem that the reader encounters in the collection is "Song for Abraham Klein", a piece that confirms Cohen's disintegration from the Jewish tradition. The poem revolves around the figure of A.M Klein, a sort of teacher for Cohen that in the poem has turned into a singer "who can still heal himself, if not the world around him" (Scobie 1978: 41). The elegiac tone of the poem corresponds with Klein's real silence in his artistic career, in which he stopped writing poetry due to a mental illness in the decade of the fifties and secluded himself in his home until his death in 1972. Klein's singing in the poem echoes this abrupt change with the lines, "He sang and nothing changed / Though many heard the song" (152). Ignored by most, nothing changes with his singing but the traditional Jewish symbols, which suffer a progressive deterioration in the poem:

(…) Departed was the Sabbath
And the Sabbath Bride.

The table was decayed,
The candles black and cold,
The bread he sang so beautifully,
That bread was mould.

(…) Abandoned was the Law,
Abandoned the King (152).

Thus, the Sabbath, the Sabbath Bride, the table, candles and bread symbolize the decay of the Jewish tradition -just as it happens in "Last Dance at the Four Penny"- as well as Klein's silenced voice. Nevertheless, the poet remains "beautiful" at the end:

He sang and nothing changed
Though many heard the song.
But soon his face was beautiful
And soon his limbs were strong (152).

The other poem of the collection dedicated to Klein is "To a Teacher", which revolves again around Klein's commitment to silence after a successful career in the Montreal Jewish literary community. The poem clearly states this fact at the beginning with the opening lines, "Hurt once and for all into silence. / A long pain ending without a song to prove it" (52). Klein's wound confines him to silence, so the speaker's tone in the poem is elegiac. As Abraham suggests, it is "almost certainly a requiem for Klein" (1996). The poem adopts the model of the saint and discipline, in which A.M Klein plays the role of the saint, and Cohen -the speaker- the one of the discipline, who asks in the second stanza:

Who could stand beside you so close to Eden,

when you glinted in every eye the held-high razor,
shivering every ram and son? (52).

But the speaker's admiration in this second stanza contrasts with the third one, in which the saint seems imprisoned by his madness, he is ignored and forced to keep silence, as well as he bears in solitude his "tiny limp":

And now the silent looney-bin,
where the shadows live in the rafters
like day-weary bats,
until the turning mind, a radar signal,
lures them to exaggerate mountain-size
on the white stone wall
your tiny limp (52).

With this stanza, Cohen introduces a threatening atmosphere for the poet, who facing the tragic ending of his teacher, he keeps asking himself in the next stanzas why everything turned wrong:

How can I leave you in such a house?
Are there no more saints and wizards
to praise their ways with pupils,
no more evil to stun with the slap
of a wet red tongue?

Did you confuse the Messiah in a mirror
and rest because he had finally come? (52).

The poem ends with the speaker's cry for help, which according to Abraham "reveals the tension between fear and determination that

epitomizes the poetic struggle between silence and voice" (1996). The influence that the teacher exerts over his discipline is both frightening and attractive, since it suggests the painful and destructive experience that saints undergo. Nevertheless, the speaker seems to defeat his terrors in the last stanza and he openly affirms the necessity of a voice in front of silence, he is then "taking up the burden his mentor can no longer bear" (Abraham 1996):

> Let me cry Help beside you, Teacher.
> I have entered under this dark roof
> as fearlessly as an honoured son
> enters his father's house (54).

Other poems of the collection dedicated to Cohen's friends and artists include "Summer Haiku", in which the Canadian couple Marian and Frank Scott "are given a moment of delicate and silent beauty" (Scobie 1978: 41). This silence contrasts with Klein's forced confinement, but it is indeed ironic how this "deeper silence" can only be apprehended when the crickets, just as Klein did, hesitate. On the other hand, the poem "Out of the Land of Heaven" dedicated to Marc Chagall -a Russian and later French painter called by the art critic Robert Hughes "the quintessential Jewish artist of the twentieth century"- is a celebration of the Jewish identity. For Abraham, "Cohen indulges the metaphoric richness of Klein, celebrating his religion and identity as one of the chosen people" (1996):

> Out of the land of heaven
> Down comes the warm Sabbath sun
> Into the spice-box of earth.
> The Queen will make every Jew her lover (162).

Klein's religious influence in the poem is adorned by Cohen's romantic images, which subordinate the existence of the sun to the glorification of the

Hebrew nation, in which the Jews are the chosen mates for the Queen in the land of heaven. The rabbi and the pupils celebrate the glory and vastness of their inheritance with songs and dances:

> In a white silk coat
> Our rabbi dances up the street,
> Wearing our lawns like a green prayer-shawl,
> Brandishing houses like silver flags.
> Behind him dance his pupils,
> Dancing not so high
> And chanting the rabbi's prayer,
> But not so sweet (162).

The Rabbi is blessed since the Queen awaits for him. He provides the wedding ring and the ceremony of marriage begins:

> And who waits for him
> On a throne at the end of the street
> But the Sabbath Queen.
> Down go his hands
> Into the spice-box of earth,
> And there he finds the fragrant sunday
> For a wedding ring,
> And draws her wedding finger through (162).

The disciplines found wives too and they join the Rabbi in joyful chants, "leaping high in the perfumed air" (162). The tone of celebration in the poem is exalted, it is almost "aggressive as it is sensuous" (Abraham, 1996); it demands indeed a self-consciousness of the Jewish race as the blessed and chosen nation, so the poem seeks the "spiritual union of identity through an affirmation of the Jewish tradition" (Abraham 1996). Then, a united sense of

identity emerges from the celebration and affirmation of the Hebraic culture.

However, the Jewish identity celebrated in the poem only focuses on the brightest side of the Hebraic tradition, so its vision cannot be holistic but peripheral. Another poem that reflects on the Jewish inheritance is "The Genius", but this time Cohen opts for a darker view of the Hebraic tradition that contrasts with the joyful celebration in "Out of the Land of Heaven". The poet enumerates along the six stanzas of the poem "all the stereotyped Jewish roles he can play" (Scobie 1978: 43). He becomes a Jew in the ghetto, "I will be a ghetto jew / and dance / and put white stockings" (176), as well as in the second stanza an apostate:

> I will be an apostate jew
> and tell the Spanish priest
> of the blood vow
> in the Talmud
> and where the bones
> of the child are hid (176).

In the third stanza the poet turns into a banker, "and bring to ruin / a proud old hunting king / and end his line" (176), but later he appears disguised as a Broadway Jew:

> I will be a Broadway jew
> and cry in theatres
> for my mother
> and sell bargain goods
> beneath the counter (176).

In the fifth stanza, he becomes a Jewish doctor, whereas in the sixth and last one:

For you
I will be a Dachau jew
and lie down in lime
with twisted limbs
and bloated pain
no mind can understand (178).

The poem culminates, thus, with an image of the Holocaust; it is indeed one of Cohen's first poems in which he overtly reflects about the tragic event. Although the poem might contain at the end some of the didacticism of his former volume *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, the form, language, and tone of this piece breaks away from the romantic lyricism and features Cohen's next volume of poetry *Flowers for Hitler*, a work in which Cohen advocates for a short, harsh, and immediate verse. As Caitlin Ward explains, "'The Genius,' with its black humour, hints at a new attitude and a new willingness to shake off the abstract veil of ancient mythologies to get at a more explicit and immediate exploration of injustice" (2008: 59). Therefore, "The Genius" -the second to last poem in *The Spice-Box of Earth*- moves away from mythologies and the personal universe of the poet to adopt a new point of view that reflects on social injustice by means of the stereotyped identities that Jews have carried along thorough history -ghetto jew, apostate, banker, Broadway jew, and doctor-.

The poet starts each stanza with the words "For you / I will be a (…) jew" (59), so the ellipsis is replaced each time by a new role. The tone of the poem is cynical, bitter and self-loathing, it seems almost as if the poet is willing to be engaged in the various anti-Semitic archetypes. This predisposition for role-playing nullifies, according to Abraham, the individual personality, "it is only through the loss of personality that people can be victimized with impunity" (1996). Therefore, the poet's acceptance of these different Jewish stereotypes can only lead to a "systematic destruction of personality", so the ending of the poem is inevitably tragic. For Abraham, stereotyping is what leads "The Genius" to its last painful ending:

> (…) stereotyping is an escalating attempt to undermine individual personality and contribute to its decline. Stereotyping, then, is an artificial influence; an attempt to categorize people according to criteria that are necessarily superficial, yet sufficiently aggressive to command submission. The complete marginalization of a people is, in effect, the imposition of an ethnic taboo. The Jews themselves become taboo persons (indeed cease to be persons) through the systematic degradation of their personalities. The negative images persistently attributed to them are an attempt to influence their personalities through an enforced submission to stereotyping (1996).

Therefore, the final image of the concentration camp represents the culmination of the former imposed stereotypes that the poet resignedly accepts with the repetition of the lines, "For you / I will be a (…) jew" (176). The poem explores, then, ultimately the Jewish victimization throughout history, in which the Hebraic nation "co-operate in their own murder" (Tester 2004: 128). This affirmation echoes Zygmunt Bauman's social thought, who views the Holocaust victims as utilitarian, "At all stages of the Holocaust (…) the victims were *confronted with a choice* (…) They could not choose between good and bad situations, but they could at least choose between greater and lesser evil" (Bauman 2013: 270). In this sense, the rational choice of the Hebraic nation for survival -instead of confrontation- leads them to the final stanza, which "exposes the horrible consequence of such repeated denigration (…) The evocation of a Nazi concentration camp is a chilling rejoinder to the rest of the poem" (Deshaye 2009: 88). Furthermore, the title of the poem is ultimately ironic, since the poet is not anymore the genius and master of his own work -"the powerful prophet"-, he is instead "a tragic puppet" victimized by preconceived notions of the Jewish identity (Abraham 1996).

Cohen dealt with the figure of the prophet in his speech 'Loneliness and History' at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal in 1964. He affirmed that the individual's isolation from the community -the acceptance of an outsider position- enables poetic creation and the "possibility of an unknown,

emergent other self" (*Discoveries of the Other,* Siemerling 1994: 32). The figure of "the powerful prophet" is explored in *The Spice-Box of Earth* in poems like "Isaiah", in which Cohen questions the Jewish scriptures in regard to the figure of Isaiah, a prominent minister and writing prophet who announced and witnessed the fall of Israel. Isaiah plays the role of the outsider in the poem; he criticizes the rituals and idols of Judaism, but at the same time he chants for the renewal of Jerusalem. He is the visionary that announces the desolation and destruction of the Hebraic nation:

> Why did Isaiah rage and cry,
> Jerusalem is ruined,
> your cities are burned with fire (...)
>
> Why then this fool Isaiah,
> smelling vaguely of wilderness himself,
> why did he shout,
> Your country is desolate (172).

In this regard, Isaiah's attitude contrasts with the one of the Hebraic society, who remains calm and prosperous. They disregard Isaiah's prophecies, in fact, they feel secure in their own luxury:

> Between the mountains of spices
> the cities thrust up pearl domes and filigree spires.
> Never before was Jerusalem so beautiful.
> In the sculptured temple how many pilgrims,
> lost in the measures of tambourine and lyre,
> kneeled before the glory of the ritual? (170).

But as a prophet, Isaiah's warnings come true, so at the end the nation suffers the consequences of its credulity and vanity. Nevertheless, a still

loving and calm atmosphere reigns at the end in Isaiah's love song:

> The rocks go back to water, the water to waste.
> And while Isaiah gently hums a sound
> to make the guilty country uncondemned,
> all men, truthfully desolate and lonely,
> as though witnessing a miracle,
> behold in beauty the faces of one another (174).

In the *Spice-Box of Earth,* the prophet to whom Cohen dedicates more poems is his own grandfather, who appears in "Priests 1957" as the wild eccentric character that "makes all the rest of the family feel that their work is 'prosaic' in comparison" (Scobie 1978: 42); so the speaker's uncle, father, and cousins ask themselves, "Must we find all work prosaic / because our grandfather built an early synagogue? (Cohen 1999: 160). Another poem in which Cohen uses the figure of his grandfather is in "Prayer of My Wild Grandfather", where the speaker's grandfather appears to be the mad prophet that God unconditionally loves, so it is God, indeed, who has rewarded the grandfather with creative powers similar to the ones of prophets and saints:

> It is no wonder fields and governments
> rotted, for soon you gave him all your range,
> drove all your love through that sting in his brain.
> Nothing can flourish in your absence
> except our faith that you are proved through him
> who had his mind made mad and honey-combed (Cohen 1999: 168).

Last but not least, Cohen finishes the collection of *The Spice-Box of Earth* with "Lines from My Grandfather's Journal", an extended prose poem that indents to be a meditation on the different subjects and tensions emerged in

the volume. The poem presents, then, different poetic images and ideas as fragments of the speaker's grandfather journal. Nevertheless, Cohen never defines clearly whether these verses in the first person belong to Cohen's voice as a poet, or they rather correspond to the grandfather, who appears in the poem as a fictional character. In Scobie's words,

> The use of the figure of the grandfather is another move in the direction of fiction, the distancing of Cohen's ideas away from the dominating first person in the lyric; but in this poem the distinctions between Cohen as poet and his grandfather as character are not kept clear enough (1978: 42).

Whether the first person of the poem corresponds to the speaker or to the character of the grandfather, the poem represents an attempt to move from the first lyrical person of *The Spice-Box of Earth* to the social and collective 'I' of *Flowers for Hitler.* The poem seems, indeed, a necessary recollection of all the themes and styles of the volume that set the poet into a new starting point, so he can search new languages and modes of expression capable of capturing the harshness and intensity of the social reality. The poem starts with a reflection on the Jewish tradition, which is both a source of tyranny and inspiration. The speaker of the poem declares in the first stanza his vast knowledge of holy books:

> I am one of those who could tell every word the pin
> went through. Page after page I could imagine the scar
> in a thousand crowned letters (180).

Despite the attraction he feels toward the knowledge of his own tradition, the poet lives trapped in it, so he wants to escape from "the Principles of Faith", but as he himself recognizes: "I will never be free from this old tyranny: 'I believe / with a perfect faith...." (180). The exploration of

tradition turns in the third stanza into an attack. It is, indeed, the mechanism that confines and limits the poet, as well as it offers him comfort in defeat:

> Why make trouble? It is better to stutter than sing.
> Become like the early Moses: dreamless of Pharaoh.
> Become like Abram: dreamless of a longer name. Become like a weak Rachel: be comforted, not comfortless.... (180).

But the poet needs to "sing" rather than to stutter, so he rejects tradition and the comfort within. In the next stanzas he witnesses "Paratroops in a white Tel Aviv street", "young men stunted in the Polish ghetto", "Jewish battalions", and "whips and the weariest patriotic arrogance...." (180). It seems as if there were no possible choices for the Jews, so at one moment the speaker asks for answers: "Who dares disdain an answer to the ovens? Any answer." (182). He is forced to admit the weight of tradition in the form of prayer: "It is strange that even now prayer is my natural language...." (182), in fact, he claims later in the poem:

> Prayer makes speech a ceremony. To observe this ritual
> in the absence of arks, altars, a listening sky: this is a rich discipline (1999: 192).

The speaker needs tradition since it is the source that shapes speech and thus prayer. Therefore, the poem captures an irresolute conflict: on one hand, the poet knows that "Real deserts are outside tradition"; so tradition is then an "exuviae of visions" -cast-off skins of larvae and insects- to which he must resist and leave behind. But on the other hand, tradition saves the poet from a painful and murderous silence, even if words are not always "beautiful enough":

> The language in which I was trained: spoken in despair
> of priestliness.
>
> This is not meant for any pulpit, not for men to chant
> or tell their children. Not beautiful enough.
>
> But perhaps this can suggest a passion. Perhaps this
> passion could be brought to clarify, make more radiant,
> the standing Law.
>
> Let judges secretly despair of justice: their verdicts
> will be more acute. Let generals secretly despair of
> triumph; killing will be defamed. Let priests secretly
> despair of faith: their compassion will be true. It is the
> tension.... (184).

It is precisely this tension in the poet's attitude towards tradition -this nowhere land- what "Lines from my Grandfather's Journal" attempts to describe. The poem reminds the reader, indeed, of the opening piece of the collection "A Kite is a Victim"; in this regard, both works capture the tension of the creative process, in which the poet's voice is subjugated to tradition, but at the same time, it finds spaces to be new and free. As Cohen reflects in the above stanzas from "Lines form my Grandfather's Journal", tradition is necessary but tyrannical, so it is the poet's duty to find a balance in this tension. As Abraham explains, "originality is achieved through the indulgence, not the rejection, of influence" (1996). This claim connects the poetry of *The Spice-Box of Earth* with the precepts of the modernists, particularly with T. S Eliot's work *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1920), where the American poet and critic establishes an influential association between the poet and the tradition that precedes him, which becomes fundamental to write and understand poetry.

The poem closes with a gesture to the spice-box that has given the title to

the volume:

> Inscription for the family spice-box:
>
> Make my body
> a pomander for worms
> and my soul
> the fragrance of cloves.
>
> Let the spoiled Sabbath
> leave no scent.
> Keep my mouth
> from foul speech.
>
> Lead your priest
> from grave to vineyard.
> Lay him down
> where air is sweet (194).

In this regard, for Scobie, "'Lines from My Grandfather's Journal" is Cohen's most complex attempt to balance and evaluate the various aspects of his relationship to the Jewish tradition" (1978: 43). Cohen recollects his Jewish inheritance and adapts it to the world of *The Spice-Box of Earth*. Nevertheless, the poet makes with "'Lines from My Grandfather's Journal" a final reflection over the Jewish tradition that announces the new direction of the Canadian artist's poetry and literary career.

1.5. *The Spice-Box of Earth*: A Recapitulation

The Spice-Box of Earth is Cohen's second volume of poetry and a central text to understand Cohen's artistic identity, since it contains many of the themes and obsessions that have haunted the Canadian artist throughout the

years. The book achieved a great critical success and was well welcomed among audiences, it supposed an important step in Cohen's career after the discreet publication of his first collection of poetry *Let Us Compare Mythologies.* Cohen gains in *The Spice-Box of Earth* precision, clarity, and a maturer voice to display his obsessions, concerns, feelings, etc., in the form of verses. In this regard, he gets rid of the heavy tradition and mythology of his former volume and he decides to explore instead his inner self as an artist. Nevertheless, tradition still persists in the volume as the title of the collection suggests, but it does not occupy a central position, it is instead at the service of the poet and his inner world.

The poems of the work are ambivalent, since they are both romantic and ironic; it seems that Cohen had gained consciousness of the romanticism of *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and decided to mock his romantic attitude in his next volume; however, in his new verses still prevailed a polished style, the rhyme, and a preference for beauty in the form of language. Nevertheless, the themes and questions that the Canadian artist explores become darker in comparison with his first work. The same romantic/ironic attitude is hold by the protagonist of Cohen's first novel *The Favourite Game,* who shares some of his obsessions and concerns with the speaker of *The Spice-Box of Earth,* such as the creative impulse that flows from romantic and sexual relationships, and the inability for commitment.

The first part of the volume gathers poems that deal with the process of creation and the relationship between the artist and his work of art. Among these poems stands "A Kite is a Victim", the opening piece of the collection and one of the most representative of Cohen's production approaches the tensions that exist between the need of control and the desire of freedom. In this regard, the 'kite' becomes "symbolic of our ego and ambitions, of all that is original and free in us" (Ondaatje 1970: 16); it is the artist's desire, thus, to 'tame' and control the kite. Nevertheless, the artist has limitations as shown in poems like "After the Sabbath Prayers" and "The Flowers that I Left in the Ground", where the poet's capacities become diminished to the point of losing control over the work of art. However, other poems of the collection like "If it were Spring" present a dominant artist who does not hesitate to murder in order to create beauty. The poet occupies the same front position

in “There are Some Men”, but this time with a more dignifying position, since the speaker does not murder but renders homage to a deceased friend. The poem ends with a rejection of the romanticism that often prevails in elegies; the same refusal of romantic values is found in “I Have not Lingered in European Monasteries” or “I Wonder How Many People in this City”, where the speaker criticizes but embraces at the same time the romantic tradition. The ambivalent attitude of the speaker in these pieces -on one side, he rejects romanticism, but on the other side, he longs for it- becomes relevant in “The Cuckold's Song”, a good poem that does not want to be a poem:

> If this looks like a poem
> I might as well warn you at the beginning
> that it's not meant to be one.
> I don't want to turn anything into poetry (Cohen 1999: 100).

In fact, Cohen the author ends participating in this piece as an actor, so it announces already Cohen's preference for the mask of the anti-poet, an attitude that he will display later in his artistic production.

The second group of poems -and central part of the volume- deals with romantic relationships. Most of the poems approach love from the angle of uncertainty, doubt, personal obsession, etc. Therefore, Cohen distances himself from the notion of ideal love in order to embrace the 'dark side of love' in the same fashion as 'Black Romantic' authors do. In this sense, there are poems that depict relationships of personal domination in terms of violence and cruelty, such as “Morning Song” or “The Girl Toy” -this last one explores as well the fear of the mechanical domination over humankind-; in other poems of the collection, the speaker doubts whether to remain beside her lover or to leave her in order to start a journey of artistic self-discovery, such as it happens in “Travel”, or to join the Hebraic nation in their Exodus as in “Credo”. The same conflict is shared by Breavman in *The Favourite Game,* who finds the perfect lover in Shell but ultimately abandons her in

favour of his art. Furthermore, the poem of the collection "As the Mist Leaves No Scar" -which appears as the epigraph of Cohen's first novel- suggests the painful ending of a relationship. Despite the 'delicateness' and the atmosphere of innocence that surrounds the verses, the piece is a grave and harsh poem that shows Cohen's preference for the 'dark'. On the contrary, "For Anne" is a simple ballad where it is not clear where romance begins and irony ends; in this regard, it is an ambivalent piece that goes hand in hand with the spirit of the volume.

Nevertheless, the central and most representative piece from this group is "You Have the Lovers", a poem that introduces the themes that Cohen later resumes in *Beautiful Losers*. Sexuality is at the core of the poem, which deals with the love-making of a couple and the presence of a third observer that ultimately participates in the encounter in order to achieve sainthood. In this regard, sexuality becomes a new religion and a discipline to be learned in order to gain the sainthood that the protagonists of *Beautiful Losers* desperately seek.

The third group of poems reflect on Cohen's Jewish inheritance. There are poems dedicated to other artists and poets, such as "Last Dance at the Four Penny", which it is addressed to Cohen's friend and poet Irving Layton and certifies the decline of tradition with the end of the 'freilach' -a Jewish dance-; "Song for Abraham Klein" and "To a Teacher" confirm this decay with the silence of Cohen's teacher, who ceases to be the prophet of the community secluded at home and silenced by a mental illness. Other poems from this group explore the glory of the Hebraic community, such as in "Out of the Land of Heaven", a joyful celebration dedicated to the painter Marc Chagall. On the other hand, the darker side of the Jewish inheritance finds its best expression on "The Genius", an ironic and terrifying poem that deepens into the different stereotyped roles that Jews have carried throughout history; however, the poem ends in tragedy in the last stanza with the irruption of the Holocaust.

Finally, the book ends rendering homage to prophets like Isaiah and also Cohen's grandfather; this last stands as the protagonist of the closing piece of the collection "Lines of My Grandfather's Journal", an extended prose poem that reflects again -such as in "A Kite is a Victim"- on the tensions

between tradition and creation, or in other words, between control and freedom.

CHAPTER II

The Favourite Game: A Fictionalization of Cohen's Artistic Persona

The following chapter features Cohen's first novel *The Favourite Game* as an artistic portrait of the author, who pours into the narrative the awakening and rebellion of a young writer from Montreal. The chapter is divided into four sections: 'Setting the Stage', 'Culture, Ethnicity and Religion as Constructions of Identity', 'Art, Love, and Sexual Desire as Premises for Creation', and '*The Favourite Game: A Recapitulation*'.

The first section attempts to classify the novel in the tradition of the Künstlerroman; however, the text is not only romantic but ironic, then it is a modern narration that uses the romantic tradition in order to explore the process of growing into adulthood of a young artist. It approaches later the autobiographical character of the novel with theoretical studies such as "Not my Real Face" (1999) from Carmen Ellison and Sylvie Simmons's biography of Leonard Cohen; it discusses the postmodernist techniques that Cohen employs in this modernist novel according to Linda Hutcheon's studies, and it finally deals with the creative impulse of the protagonist and his cinematic narrative.

Section two explores questions of identity in the novel: the religious and cultural background of the protagonist, the streets of Montreal and the Canadian landscape, the political and cultural scene of the nation, and Breavman's inner artistic concerns and personal relationships. The section gives, thus, not only a broad portrait of the protagonist but of Canada as well. Then, section three analyses Breavman's attitude towards the artistic

profession, his relationship with time and decay, the symbolism of scars and games in the narrative, the awakening of sexuality, and the destruction of loving relationships as an artistic source for Breavman's 'Favourite Game'. Finally, section four summarizes and gathers the main ideas of the chapter.

2.1. Setting the Stage

The Favourite Game (1963) is Cohen's first official novel; however, he previously wrote semi-autobiographical short stories and the unpublished 'A Ballet of Lepers', a novel rejected by Canadian publishers that explored "the promise and failure of self-constitution through exclusion of the other" (Siemerling 1993: 90). Self-constitution, a concept studied by the philosopher Christine Korsgaard in *The Constitution of Agency* (2008) and *Self-Constitution; Agency, Identity and Integrity* (2009), appears again in Cohen's *Favourite Game.* In this regard, self-constitution attributes actions to the individual, whom possesses a personal constitution from which these actions emerge rather than from other possible external forces. Therefore, what distinguishes a good action from a bad one is the integration of them into a valid constitutional system ruled by Kant's categorical imperative (Korsgaard 2009: 10).

In *The Favourite Game,* the protagonist Lawrence Breavman rejects systems and lives according to his subjective reasoning, without making moral judgements about his actions. However, he fails in this attempt and he ultimately abandons his community to keep living under the promise of free-will; he takes refuge into inner exile and isolation to protect his self-constitution as an artist. Therefore, 'self-constitution' is a central concept in *The Favourite Game,* a novel that critics have often referred to as a modernist version of the *Künstlerroman,* since it involves a process of artistic growing and maturity that reminds of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

There are indeed several parallelisms between these two works, both novels narrate the artistic awakening of two youngsters in conflict with the values of the societies in which they live. In Joyce's novel, the protagonist

Stephan Dedalus questions the Catholic and Irish conventions under which he has grown up, whereas in *The Favourite Game* the young Lawrence Breavman rejects the materialism and shallowness of the Jewish Montreal community to which he belongs; in this regard, Breavman is considered a traitor in his community and at the end he opts for self-exile, just as Joyce's protagonist leaves Ireland for a more promising Europe. The process of maturity into adulthood and the discovery of an artistic vocation vertebrates both narrations and acknowledges their romantic roots in the sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman* tradition inaugurated in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In this sense, *The Favourite Game* has an important romantic background that Patricia Morley points out:

> A preference for imagination and emotion rather than reason; an emphasis upon the individual; philosophic idealism and religious mysticism; revolt against authority and social conventions; exaltation of physical passion; and in some romantics, glorification of morbidity, melancholy, and cruelty. Sounds like The Favourite Game? Well yes- and no. Cohen is Keats with a difference (1976: 125)

All the ingredients of Morley's above quotation are present in Cohen's novel, but as she herself suggests at the end of it, there is not only romanticism but irony in *The Favourite Game*. Cohen is both a romantic and a satirist, so his protagonist Lawrence Breavman jokes about being the Keats he thinks Canadians are desperate for, he is the "mild Dylan Thomas, talent and behaviour modified for Canadian tastes" (Cohen 2003: 110). In the novel, Breavman often presents a grotesque image of himself as an artist self-conscious of his own romanticism who "longs for the lyric isolation of his own beautiful pain" (Scobie 1978: 74). Therefore, the young Montrealer combines a romantic discourse in which art is the supreme value with a 'Rebelaisian' humour that mocks his necessity of isolation and pain. Just as Cohen does in many of his songs, Breavman manages to make comedy out

of his personal drama.

Furthermore, the protagonist of *The Favourite Game* recognizes his own limitations and cruelty in several episodes, as Ondaatje writes, “he knows he is the chief villain as well as the hero” (1970: 25). Both his limitations and impulses are presented in the form of irony, for example, in the French party at the Palais d'Or, “Breavman waved his fist at everyone, hitting very few” (Cohen 2003: 41); or in the game he plays with Lisa, 'The Soldier and the Whore', both children reproduce in their innocence a morally dubious adult talk:

> Their game forbade talking dirty or roughhouse. They had no knowledge of the sordid aspect of brothels, and who knows if there is one? They thought of them as some sort of pleasure palace, places denied them as arbitrarily as Montreal movie theatres.
> Whores were ideal women just as soldiers were ideal men.
> “Pay me now?”
> “Here's all my money, beautiful baby” (25).

On the other hand, these ironies contrast in the novel with Breavman's romanticism, who idealizes past childhood events, such as playing in the snow with Lisa:

> Jesus! I just remembered what Lisa's favourite game was. After a heavy snow we would go into a back yard with a few of our friends. The expanse of snow would be white and unbroken. Bertha was the spinner. You held her hands while she turned on her heels, you circled her until your feet left the ground. Then she let go and you flew over the snow. You remained still in whatever position you landed. When everyone had been flung in this fashion into the fresh snow, the beautiful part of the game began. You stood up carefully, taking great pains not to disturb the impression you had made. Now the comparisons. Of course you would have done your best to land in some crazy position, arms and legs sticking out. Then we walked away,

> leaving a lovely white field of blossom-like shapes with footprint stems (244).

Breavman's romanticism and melancholy is also noteworthy when he speculates with an adult reunion with his former friend Krantz, "when would they sit beside the water like small figures in a misty scroll painting, and talk about their long exile?" (196). Or when he talks in heroic terms of her lover Shell, "whose ears were pierced so she could wear the long filigree earrings" (3). Therefore, romanticism and irony go hand in hand in Breavman's mind, who does not hesitate to tease the girl Wanda in the summer camp with his wit and humour: "Do you know what the ambition of our generation is, Wanda? We all want to be Chinese mystics living in thatched huts, but getting laid frequently" (210).

Another parallelism between *The Favourite Game* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the autobiographical component of both narrations. If Stephen Dedalus is the fictional alter ego of James Joyce, Lawrence Breavman is clearly the one of Cohen; the Canadian artist, who began to write the novel in London and finished it in the Greek island of Hydra, gives an account of his childhood memories and his youthful experiences in Montreal and New York. As Cohen wrote in a letter to his editor Jack McClelland, he and Breavman "did a lot of the same things (…), but we reacted different to them and so we became different men" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 91).

The book can be read then as a sort of semi-autobiography in which the Montreal artist novelises his relationships with his family and friends through the third person narrator of Breavman. As Cohen's biographer Sylvie Simmons acknowledges in *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* (2012), many episodes of his childhood appear in *The Favourite Game,* such as the tea parties of his mother, the funeral of his father, the hypnosis of the house-maid, who also played the ukulele as Heather does in the novel, etc. Furthermore, all the central characters seem to find a correspondent person in real life, so the character of Krantz is based on Cohen's friendship with the sculptor Mort Rosengarten, who was his youth companion in their first

forays into the bohemian Montreal, as well as the lover Shell appears to be Georgiana Sherman, the young Program Coordinator at International House which Cohen met at Columbia University and with whom he fell in love. It is not surprising, then, the disapproval of Cohen's uncles when they first read *The Favourite Game* and they recognized themselves in the fictional members of the Jewish community that betrayed religious heritage in favour of financial success.

Due to the resemblances between Cohen's life and Lawrence Breavman's experiences -they both grew up in a Jewish prosperous family in Montreal's Westmount district and they found more important their development as artists rather than formal education and family businesses- some critics have considered *The Favourite Game* to be an autobiography. In this regard, Carmen Ellison argues in her article "Not my Real Face" (1999) that although Cohen's narration is written in the 3rd person and Breavman is a fictional character who does not share his name, the study of the use of personal pronouns in the text acknowledges Cohen's intention of writing a sort of autobiography in the third person.

Ellison supports this evidence with "the oscillation of pronouns" (1999: 64). Cohen writes most of his novel in the 3rd person, but sometimes he breaks this continuity introducing a 1st person narrator; for example, at the end of the novel, Cohen uses the pronoun 'we':

> He tore the books as his father weakened. He didn't know why he hated the careful diagrams and colored plates. We do. It was to scorn the world of detail, information, precision, all the false knowledge which cannot intrude on decay (17).

For Ellison, the use of 'we' symbolizes the collapse of time, the narrator's agency is divided into his past and present self, so the boundaries between Breavman and the narrator become not so clear, as Ellison points out, "Cohen writes about himself as someone else, yet the other, Breavman, is also Cohen" (1999: 72).

Other similar studies have described *The Favourite Game* as a "thinly veiled autobiography" with a detached narrator from the story (McFarlane, 1999: 73); whereas others consider that Cohen uses his own public persona as an intertext: "Breavman (…) is a grotesque or twisted figure of Cohen, who is simultaneously absent and present in the traces that constitute that character" (Milton 1999: 240). Nonetheless, whether Cohen's implication with Breavman is autobiographical or not, the text is presented as fiction, just as Cohen claimed in an interview in 1963: "The emotion is autobiographical, because the only person's emotions I know about are my own. The incidents are not autobiographical. I apologize. I am terribly sorry. I cringe before the tyranny of fact, but it is not autobiographical. I made it up" (as cited in Vermeulen 2011: 29).

It is clear that Cohen's material for artistic production "revolves around his own personality as artist, his 'life in art'" (Hutcheon 1990: 1), but he craftily displays it in *The Favourite Game* by means of intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and characterization; all of them techniques associated with a postmodernist sensibility. Since postmodernism, roughly speaking, reacts against the precepts of modernism, it is significant that Hutcheon still considers *The Favourite Game* to be a modernist text, though it "paves the way for the postmodernism of *Beautiful Losers*" (1988: 26). She believes that "the move from the modernism of the first novel to the postmodernism of the second is marked by a shift in the level of self-reference -from the content to the form of the work" (Hutcheon 1988: 27). In this sense, Cohen manages to do an exercise of self-reference in both novels, but whereas in *The Favourite Game* it is only at the level of content, with *Beautiful Losers* the Montreal author challenges narrative conventions with techniques such as apparent falseness that make the reader aware of the artificial nature of the text. In the same fashion of postmodernist novels -metafiction- *Beautiful Losers* reflects about the process of reading and writing, as well as about the nature of fiction.

But *The Favourite Game* is textually self-reflexive in content, so the novel includes meta-reflections about the act of writing, the creative process, the nature of language, etc. It explores questions of creativity and reflects about the role of the artist in modern society by means of the story of the writer

Lawrence Breavman. Indeed, the reader can easily find throughout the novel hints and references that point to the creative process. For Hutcheon, a set of images support this view: "Scars, movies, photographs, black/white oppositions, sexuality itself – all these act as pointers both to the textual, written nature of what is being read and also to the process of creation that is in progress" (1990: 9). Therefore, these elements not only fulfil a specific dramatic role in the novel, but they contribute as well to construct the self-reflexivity of the narration.

Cohen also employs a collection of songs, diaries, home movies, letters and scrapbooks that express Breavman's subjectivity and contribute to construct his portrait as an artist. They are embedded texts that acknowledge the use of intertextuality in *The Favourite Game* and they reflect as well on the awareness of the literary text. Some of these texts are poems that Cohen previously published in *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961), which are presented as Breavman's own creations. The inclusion of this poetry might highlight Cohen's autobiographical intention with *The Favourite Game*, but for Hutcheon, "rather than merely acting as a coy autobiographical indicator, this kind of textual pointer again directs the reader's attention to the essentially literary (not amorous) nature of Cohen's principal interest" (1990: 13). Therefore, this intertextual reference points out to an extra-textual level of the novel in which the outside world is incorporated into the fictional text; narration, thus, is not only transgressed at the intradiegetic level of intertextuality, but also at the extradiegetic level with the incorporation of Cohen's personal poems.

Another example of this transgression linked with Cohen's autobiography occurs in the narrative voice that transcends the third person narration and introduces the pronoun 'we' in the text, so the boundaries between Breavman and Cohen become unclear: "He didn't know why he hated the careful diagrams and coloured plates. We do" (Cohen 2003: 17). This pronoun shift aforementioned in Ellis's article "Not my real Face" might not suggest an autobiographical intention on Cohen's part as Ellis wrote, but rather an emphasis on self-reference and self-consciousness of artificiality in the novel, so it reminds the reader that behind Breavman's narration stands Cohen as author.

It is important to mention as well another structure that induces auto-referentiality in the text: the *mise en abyme.* This French term is generally used to describe the experience of standing between two mirrors, so one sees an infinite image of oneself. Nevertheless, in critical theory, the *mise en abyme* alludes to the "formal technique in which an image contains a smaller copy of itself, in a a sequence appearing to recur infinitely" (Chambers 1984: 52). It was the French author André Gide who coined this term in 1893 in an entry of his journal, so he could describe self-reflexive embedding art works such as 'Las Meninas' (1656) from Diego de Velázquez or Shakespeare's "play within in a play" in *Hamlet* (1603). In *The Favourite Game,* the *mise en abyme* acts in an internal level, it is an "important structural mirroring" (Hutcheon 1990: 11) that connects aesthetic metaphors, such as Tamara's thighs -which are compared to a snowfall- to Lisa's buttocks and her favourite game -making shapes in the snow-. As Hutcheon explains:

> When, for instance, Tamara's thighs are compared to a snowfall, the author has, in effect, connected two major aesthetic metaphors. Early in the novel, the child Breavman marvels at the dazzling white of Lisa's buttocks; the novel ends with his seemingly random memory of Lisa's favourite game -making shapes in the snow. This scarring or branding of the white snow and the (fantasy) whipping of the white female body both become metaphors of the white of the page upon which the poet leaves his mark. That they should come together in a description of Tamara is only fitting, for she is the first woman Breavman writes about directly, and he does so in order to hurt her, to leave her – the necessary precondition for artistic creation (1990: 11-12).

This complex internal structure, along with the rest of embedded texts, and the exploration of the creative act as the central theme of the novel confirm *The Favourite Game* as a modernist text that already pointed to the auto-referentiality and metafiction of the postmodern. In this sense, Cohen's first novel preserves the "modernist ideal of the well-made, formally complete poem" (Scobie 1991: 65) with its polished and beautiful prose, but

it introduces at the same time a reflection on creativity and the nature of the literary text.

The question of creativity is present in the four parts of the novel that gather moments in the life of the artist from the 1940's and 1950's: the first book deals with Breavman's childhood, his games and first memories; in book two, Breavman is a young adult in conflict with his community that seeks inspiration for his art in the women he meets. Book three narrates the story of Shell from Breavman's perspective, she is the 'perfect wife' that menaces to end with his art; whereas in book four Breavman leaves her lover and goes back to Montreal, though he rejects his community and accepts the isolation of the artist. The plot of the novel is almost non-existent and the descriptions and dialogues of the novel may be read as long prose poems, since there is not a cohesive time sequence to unify the narrative segments. As Ondaatje suggests, "we are not reading a formal novel but are looking at various episodes in the life of Breavman" (1970: 24). The book becomes, thus, an autobiography of Breavman written in the third person, in which the protagonist studies different episodes in his childhood and young adulthood "in order to discover a clearer, more objective, picture of himself" (Ondaatje 1970: 24).

In the study of these episodes, cinematic imagery plays an important role in the construction of Breavman's portrait. Each episode of the novel adopts the form of a cinematographic scene, so there is a sense of detachment in what the narrator accounts. This technique or visual style allows the narrator to present events in a safely-distanced and controlled manner, then the protagonist Lawrence Breavman can turn into art the events of his life, "he must distance in order to transmute them into art" (Hutcheon 1988: 47). The novel is presented, then, as a set of scenes in which Breavman plays the protagonist role; he appears in different snapshots or photographic images with characters such as Shell, Tamara, Krantz, etc. For Ondaatje, "we get to see only the perfect photographic image, and this is why the book appears so romantic. It is Breavman the romantic artist who connects these images" (1970: 26). In this regard, Breavman chooses the perfect moment and captures it in a frozen image, "where everyone is seen in their 'condition of highest beauty'" (Ondaatje 1970: 26).

In the following passage, for example, the picture that Breavman dramatizes reminds of a Hollywood film in which experience is intensified due to romantic overtones: "They held hands tightly and watched the stars in the dark part of the sky; where the moon was bright they were obliterated. She told him she loved him. A loon went insane in the middle of the lake" (32). These "perfect moments" externalized Breavman's romantic mind, but at the same time they imply a self-consciousness of the camera; for example, in Breavman's sexual encounter with Norma, "the camera takes them from faraway, moves through the forest (…) Sudden close-up of her body (…) Camera records them lying in silence" (76). There is, thus, a sense of voyeurism and a physicality of the camera in which the poet observes himself in his most intimate moments. Indeed, Breavman himself dramatizes his own persona, "That summer Breavman had a queer sense of time slowing down. He was in a film and the machine was whirring into slower and slower motion" (73).

Therefore, Breavman's mind becomes externalized by means of the camera, which transfigures and examines reality in "a slow-motion movie running somewhere in his mind" (Cohen 2003: 104). But Breavman uses films too to control one of his obsessions, which is none other than the passage of time; for example, he stops a family movie in order to study his family history, but the image "is eaten by a spreading orange-rimmed stain as the film melts (…) Breavman is mutilating the film in his efforts at history" (6). Then, he fails in his attempt to interrupt time in order to freeze the historical past.

2.2. Culture, Ethnicity and Religion as Constructions of Identity

The cinematic imagery connects *The Favourite Game* with other literary works of the time in which the techniques of cinema and the influence of the Hollywood industry had already impregnated the realms of narrative fiction. Some of these works to which *The Favourite Game* has been compared to include novels such as *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J.D Salinger, and *On the Road* (1957) by Jack Kerouac. *The Catcher in the Rye* adopts the form of

the *Bildungsroman* to portray the story of a rebellious teenager in the New York of the 1940's; the protagonist's unconformity reminds inevitably of Lawrence Breavman's attitude, so similitudes between the two works led some part of the press to call *The Favourite Game* at the time of its publication "The Canadian 'Catcher in the Rye'" (Rigelhof 2000).

Kerouac's book fictionalizes instead his travels across America in the company of friends. The book condenses countercultural attitudes and emerges as a defining work for the Beats, which were "a literary movement dedicated to personal liberty, truth and self-expression and influenced by bebop jazz, Buddhism and experiments with drugs and sex" (Simmons 2012: 56). Cohen did not belong to this movement, but due to a time and local confluence -he watched Kerouac's poetry reading accompanied by jazz musicians in a Greenwich Village club in 1957- he became to some extent influenced by them. In Cohen's words, "I felt close to those guys, and I later bumped into them here and there, although I can't describe myself remotely as part of that circle" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 57). However, this influence is pronounced in Cohen's later works rather than in *The Favourite Game*, in which the book still conserves a traditional and polished prose that 'beatniks' considered old-fashioned. Nevertheless, the novel shares with *On the Road* several aspects: an emphasis on musicality and cinematic imagery, a religious and creative quest, and above all, a strong sense of the self.

In order to study the strong 'sense of the self' that vertebrates *The Favourite Game,* it is mandatory to refer to questions of identity in the novel. In the previous section of the chapter it has been mentioned how *The Favourite Game* can be read to some extent as an autobiography, since it reflects on Cohen's artistic persona and collects his experiences as a young writer in Montreal. The novel emerges, then, as a central text to understand Cohen's Jewish-Canadian identity as an artist; furthermore, it introduces many of the subjects that the Montreal writer explores in his latter works.

The identity of Lawrence Breavman in *The Favourite Game* is firmly rooted on a specific setting: the city of Montreal, from which Breavman "believed he understood its elegant sadness better than anyone else" (Cohen 2003: 109). Breavman's family house is located on Belmont Avenue, where from the window of his bedroom the adolescent contemplates the Westmount's

Murray Hill Park, a mythic green space that fosters the poet's imagination and his desires for freedom and independence:

> The park nourished all the sleepers in the surrounding houses. It was the green heart. It gave the children dangerous bushes and heroic landscapes so they could imagine bravery. (…) It gave the retired brokers vignettes of Scottish lanes where loving couples walked, so they could lean on their canes and imagine poetry (69).

Breavman's district -the rich Westmount populated by the leading Jewish community- contrasts in the novel with the downtown area, where impoverished immigrants live, so when Breavman and his friends joke about danger, they refer to a whore on De Bullion Street in the city centre. Therefore, there is an accurate description of the city of Montreal with its streets, avenues, parks, etc.; but the novel also includes other scenarios such as the University of Columbia in New York, where the young Breavman enrolls without success in some courses but discovers the importance of being away from home in order to comprehend his identity; and the summer camp located in the natural spaces of Canada, where the protagonist briefly works as supervisor of young adolescents and acknowledges the destruction of his inner world.

The Favourite Game includes, thus, descriptive passages about Montreal and New York, as well as natural spaces that contrast with the urban scenarios. It is through these spaces that Breavman constructs his own sense of nation, so one day that Breavman is with Norma -one of his girlfriends- on the beach, he thinks: "America was lost, the scabs ruled everything, the skyscrapers of chrome would never budge, but Canada was here, infant dream, the stars high and sharp and cold, and the enemies were brittle and easy and English" (76). The natural space of Canada once compared to the urban landscape of America emerges as the ideal form of society and turns into "an apocalyptic metaphor of the artist's dream of an ideal community" (Morley 1972: 80). In this regard, the wilderness of nature offers the

possibility of freedom and creation, whereas in the American metropolis there is no place for playing 'favourite games'.

However, Canada's portrait in the novel is not always as positive as in the passage above; it is indeed recurrently satirized as a land of 'insiders' that conventionally embrace commodities and a bourgeois life. The protagonist regrets how his community neglects religious duty in favour of economical success. He even personalizes his disgust by directly pointing to his own tribe, "Hello Canada, you big Canada, you dull, beautiful resources. Everybody is Canadian. The Jew's disguise won't work" (229). Therefore, the historical notion of the Jew as an 'outsider' -to whom Breavman proudly belongs- becomes destroyed by Canada's uniformity, in which "no one is allowed to be different" (Morley 1972: 80). It is the artist instead the one that emerges as the 'outsider' of the community and severely judges his fellow citizens, who at Breavman's eyes appear to be all social conformists. The young artist's morals contrast, then, with the one of his elders, who:

> Weren't they supposed to be a holy people consecrated to purity, service, spiritual honesty? Weren't they a nation set apart?
> Why had the idea of a jealously guarded sanctity degenerated into a sly contempt for the goy, empty of self-criticism?
> Parents were traitors (…)
> Smug traitors who believed spiritual fulfilment had been achieved because Einstein and Heifetz are Jews (41).

These questions are formulated by the narrator after an encounter between Breavman and Krantz, this latter is the protagonist's best friend and his companion of adventures in childhood and adolescence. In this encounter, both teenagers rebel against authority by criticizing the figures of the Prime Minister and Rabbi Swort. They firmly believe that their elders have betrayed their spiritual inheritance and their minds have morally degenerated, so they need to find other role models. Therefore, the narrator's questions suggest what both teenagers suspect, "the decline of Judaism into

Jewishness, of ancient religion to modern sociology (…) the gulf between a rich past and debased present, their fall from Sinai to the golden calf and broken tablets of Westmount" (Greenstein 1989: 120).

This fall is embodied for Breavman in the figure of his uncles, who are the successful businesses men that rule the community. They proudly attend religious ceremonies in the synagogue as part of their social duties, but they do not seem to care whether it is right or wrong to link the religious fervour with the exercise of power. They belong to a hierarchical and organized religion that according to Breavman forgets about the sacred character of the rite:

> Couldn't they see how it had to be nourished? And all these men who bowed, who performed the customary motions, they were unaware that other men had written the sacred tune, other men had developed the seemingly eternal gestures out of clumsy confusion. They took for granted what was dying in their hands" (127).

In this regard, Breavman criticizes the superficiality of his uncles who are not aware of the revealed scrolls of Judaism, he wishes to combat their conventional understanding of religion in order to reach a purer worship. However, Breavman lacks power since he has chosen to be the 'outsider' of the community, so he can just ramble around the park and blame his uncles for their "easy confessions" in the internal struggle he holds with himself:

> Uncles, why do you look so confident when you pray? Is it because you know the words? When curtains of the Holy Ark are drawn apart and gold-crowned Torah scrolls revealed, and all the men of the altar wear white clothes, why don't your eyes let go of the ritual, why don't you succumb to raving epilepsy? Why are your confessions so easy? (70).

It is obvious that Breavman wants to flee from the organized system that

his uncles lead in order to embrace a new understanding of life and religion, so he probably escaped for this reason from Montreal to New York. As Greenstein suggests, “He has to leap over the shallow preceding generation to return to the moral passion of the prophets (Isaiah) and the fervour of a Hassidic tradition (Baal Shem Tov)” (1989: 122). However, it is a long process the one that Breavman follows in order to reach the 'fervour' of tradition, so the reader witnesses from book one to book four the changes that the protagonist internally undergoes.

In this sense, the Breavman child does not seem truly to comprehend what does it mean to be a Jew at the beginning of the novel, so religion for him “was grateful”, but at the same time, he felt that it was an “alien experience”. Indeed, there are episodes that contradict his personal approach to it: on one hand, he does not want to get involved with those who do not belong to his tribe, “We refuse to pass the circumcision line (…) We do not wish to join Christian clubs or weaken our blood through inter-marriage" (7); but on the other hand, he refuses to pay service to Judaism when his Torah falls to the ground when wrestling with her friend Lisa in the Westmount park, even “it was mandatory to kiss a holy book which had fallen to the ground” (33). As an adolescent Breavman starts to rebel against the authority of the community; he discusses in a humorous tone with his friend Krantz the idea of belonging to the Jewish race. Despite the boys joke about it, they probably use humour to explore serious themes such as the Holocaust, a distant episode in geography but not so much in time:

> -Krantz, is it true that we are Jewish?
> -So it has been rumoured, Breavman.
> -Do you feel Jewish, Krantz?
> -Thoroughly.
> -Do your teeth feel Jewish?
> -Especially my teeth, to say nothing of my left ball. Just saying.
> -We really shouldn't joke, what we were just saying reminds me of pictures from the camps.
> -True (43).

The idea that two accommodated Montreal teenagers hold over war and the tragedy of the Holocaust is misrepresented by the accounts of mass media, so both Breavman and Krantz do not truly seem to understand the magnitude of the tragedy. In this sense, they play with the events and images that media have filled on their minds, so Breavman slaps a girl's face "like a Gestapo investigator" (Cohen 2003: 55). Furthermore, it relies a romanticized idea of war in Breavman's account far away from reality:

> The Japs and Germans were beautiful enemies. They had buck teeth or cruel monocles and commanded in crude English with much saliva. They started the war because of their nature.
> Red Cross ships must be bombed, all parachutists machine-gunned. Their uniforms were stiff and decorated with skulls. They kept on eating and laughed at appeals for mercy.
> They did nothing warlike without a close-up of perverted glee.
> Best of all, they tortured. To get secrets, to make soap, to set examples to towns of heroes. But mostly they tortured for fun, because of their nature.
> Comic books, movies, radio programmes centred their entertainment around the fact of torture. Nothing fascinates a child like a tale of torture. With the clear- est of consciences, with a patriotic intensity, children dreamed, talked, acted orgies of physical abuse. Imaginations were released to wander on a reconnaissance mission from Calvary to Dachau.
> European children starved and watched their parents scheme and die. Here we grow up with toy whips. Early warning against our future leaders, the war babies (12).

Nevertheless, Breavman appears at the end as the young adult who wants to reunite the figure of the priest -who guides the community- and the figure of the prophet -the outsider that seeks for the unknown (*Discoveries of the Other,* Siemerling 1994: 30). In this sense, the Breavman's family name in the Jewish community of Westmount stands as a symbol of tradition. It is associated with the moral ideals -based on reason and a strict code of ethics- that Jewish people brought from Europe to Canada in the late-nineteenth-

and early-twentieth century:

> The Breavmans founded and presided over most of the institutions which make the Montreal Jewish community one of the most powerful in the world today. The joke around the city is: The Jews are the conscience of the world and the Breavmans are the conscience of the Jews. "And I am the conscience of the Breavmans," adds Lawrence Breavman. "Actually we are the only Jews left; that is, super- Christians, first citizens with cut prongs" (7).

After his father dies at an early age, Breavman sees himself as the conscience of his family and race. In fact, the young boy inherits the ambivalence of his family name. On one side, the Breavman's are supposed to stand as the conscience of the Jewish race, so the role of the family might stand close to the one of the artist and religious man who preserves and honours tradition. But on the other hand, the Breavman's are at the front of Montreal's economy due to their faith on hard working and reason. It is in this latter sense that the face of Lawrence Breavman's father "glows with Victorian reason and decency" (Cohen 2003: 22). The Victorian ideals and ethics of the family, "We are Victorian gentlemen of Hebraic persuasion" (7), go hand in hand with scientific advancements, such as the click of Breavman father's gun, which to the child's ears is "the marvellous sound of all murderous scientific achievement" (16). However, these values contrast with the role of the artist, "with the persecuted brother, the near-poet, the innocent of the machine toys, the sighing judge who listens but does not sentence (…). He can rest. Breavman has inherited all his concerns" (26). Therefore, Breavman's father seems to embody the double nature of the family name, but it will be his son Lawrence the one who inherits it in order to question and challenge the set of values associated with his family.

The death of his father -the family name indeed suggests "loss" or "bereavement" (Morley 1976: 125)- allows Lawrence to freely develop his artistic and spiritual persona, which would have been probably repressed by his father's Victorian values if he had been alive. But once Lawrence's father

disappears, there is not a fixed structure in the family any more, so everything seems to be allowed for Lawrence. In this regard, Milton establishes a parallelism with the Fall myth and affirms that "if God is dead, all things are permitted, if nothing fixes the structure, there is only free-play of the elements" (1999: 240). The family loses, then, its moral centre, which in the Judeo-Christian patriarchal tradition corresponds to the paternal figure, so Breavman quickly substitutes the void of the father's absence for artistic creation; he develops his own voice at an early age and starts questioning his environment.

The young artist reacts against his uncles' behaviours by betraying the Jewish community. He keeps faithful to his religion, but he decides to ignore family businesses in order to embrace a literary and artistic career. Breavman begins to write novels, poems and songs, whereas at the same time he adopts a bohemian lifestyle that clashes with what is socially and economically expected from him. His mother calls him "a traitor not a son" when he refuses to eat his "three square meals", and he starts to sleep during the daytime; he employs nights in roaming the park and the streets of Montreal, so he can acquire an artistic education that sets him apart from "the men floating in sleep in the big stone houses. Because their lives were ordered and their rooms tidy. Because their got up every morning and did their public work. Because they weren't going to dynamite their factories and have naked parties in the fire" (59).

But Breavman's mother is not the only one to call him a traitor, the narrator uses this epithet as well in Breavman's investiture as a writer in the Montreal Jewish community. The young writer publishes his first book of Montreal sketches and he manages to get some attention from the Montreal's literary community; but at the same time, he rejects a scholarship to do academic work at Columbia University, so he is "considered a mild traitor who could not be condemned outright" (Cohen 2003: 102).

He cannot be condemned outright since the young Breavman seems capable of making a living from his art, furthermore, the Jewish community has traditionally valued writing, since it is "an essential part of the Jewish tradition" (Cohen 2003: 108). Nevertheless, the community judges Breavman's detachment from a more conventional life, so he takes refuge

into the inner exile of the marginalized writer. Instead of studying hard and working at a well-paid and regular job, Breavman opts for the life of a bohemian artist, but with all the commodities of the bourgeois.

In this sense, Breavman is very aware of his position as a writer in the Montreal community. He knows how the Montreal bourgeois dedicate their efforts to culture as well, since the love for literature and the arts indicates a tendency to 'gentility'. Breavman takes advantage of this situation and frequently mocks the 'literary life' of his city; he ironically describes himself as "a kind of mild Dylan Thomas, talent and behaviour modified for Canadian tastes" (110). In this sense, for Patricia Morley, "Cohen makes excellent comedy out of Breavman's self-consciousness, his simultaneous indulgence and demolition of the romantic role" (1972: 133). Therefore, Breavman is not only the romantic artist who suffers for his inner exile, but the cynical and ironic youngster who "slept with as many pretty chairwoman as he could (…) He could maintain an oppressive silence at a dinner-table to make the lovely daughter of the house believe he was brooding over her soul" (101-102). In fact, he recognizes how his "disciplined melancholy is a hoax, a calculated display of suffering" (Morley 1972: 133) that helps him to advance in the personal realm. He is capable of distorting the authenticity of the artist in order to gain personal favours.

Breavman's ironic comments about the literary life of Montreal correspond with the cultural desert in which the nation of Canada seems to be trapped. The country is not the "mosaic of nationalities" in which First Nations, French, English, and Jewish exchange their cultural views and traditions. Breavman's cynicism is patent when he speaks about Canada's 'cross-fertilization', "That's why we're great, Krantz. The cross-fertilization" (93), which is nothing else the poor result of blending "vicious" French and Jewish, and "absurd" English. Canada appears, then, as a country "desperate for a Keats" (109), in which "Literary meetings are the manner in which Anglophiles express passion" (109) and "writers are interviewed on TV for one reason only: to give the rest of the nation a good laugh" (123). Furthermore, Breavman suggests that there is nothing outside Montreal's cultural circle: "Do they have any Art in Winnipeg?" (221), he asks in a cocktail party.

Trapped in this 'cultural desert', the two teenagers Breavman and Krantz look for what is natural, “If only they could find the right girls. Then they could fight their way out of the swamp. Not Kleenex girls” (Cohen 2003: 47). The girls that Breavman and Krantz look for are natural and seek to prevail authenticity over the hypocrisy that reigns in society; they do not use kleenex to fill up their bra. In the novel, indeed, the Kleenex stands as the “metaphor for hypocrisy, deception and the imitations so prevalent in our culture” (Morley 1972: 78). In this sense, there is a significant episode where the young Breavman discovers that everybody wears to some extent Kleenex in order to appear to be what they are not. Even Breavman himself decides to pack some of them into the sole of his shoes, so he might look taller. Ashamed by his smallness -he calls himself “The Cunning Dwarf”- Breavman heads to a teenage party with the kleenex under his feet, but there he acknowledges that everyone is wearing them as prosthesis, “Maybe some had Kleenex noses and Kleenex ears and Kleenex hands. Depression seized him” (Cohen 2003: 37). He regrets his own behaviour, he scoops out the balls of kleenex, and he asks Muffin -a girl who was rumoured to stuff kleenex on her bra- to remove her own:

> He tugged off his shoes, scooped out the balls of Kleenex and laid them like a secret in her lap.
> Muffin's nightmare had just begun. "Now you take yours out."
> "What are you talking about?" she demanded in a voice which surprised her because it sounded so much like her mother's.
> Breavman pointed to her heart. "Don't be ashamed. You take yours out."
> He reached for her top button and received his balls of Kleenex in the face.
> "Get away!" (38).

It is at this point that Breavman realizes in his teenage years that hypocrisy is not only a concern that affects the behaviour of his uncles towards religion, it affects instead everyone in all kind of situations, such as the episode above in which teenagers use 'kleenex prosthesis' in order to fit

in the social group and not to be out of tune with the stereotypes imposed by society.

Breavman reacts against this discovery by returning back to childhood in an almost obsessive manner, he believes that important values such as innocence and naivety only reign in childhood, since the adult society has still not corrupted the children's minds; children are allowed, thus, to be themselves. In this regard, Breavman associates the process of growing old with the acquisition of the hypocritical behaviour of adults. Breavman wants to flee form these 'adult behaviours', but at the same time he is aware that he is not innocent any more, even if he desires it to be, he is nothing else than: "I'm the keeper (…) I'm the sentimental dirty old man in front of a classroom of children" (64). Furthermore, he wants to withhold from all his past events, so he tells Lisa, his former friend of childhood, "I don't want to forget anyone I was ever connected with" (97).

In this sense, Breavman is going to adopt as a young adult an attitude of detachment from reality. He prefers to look back at the past and to ignore the mechanisms that rule the adult world. This attitude contrasts with the one of his friend Krantz, who in the first part of *The Favourite Game* is presented as Breavman's best ally. They discover the world together and the meaning of friendship: "They sat one night on someone's lawn, two Talmudists, delighting in their dialectic, which was a disguise for love. It was furious talk, the talk of a boy discovering how good it was not to be alone" (Cohen 2003: 39). Their conversations stand as the best means to approach and comprehend reality, as well as the best way to express their artistic, social, and personal concerns. In this sense, Krantz is the witty and intelligent partner that Breavman needs to display his cleverness, so he can explore throughout their dialogues his inner self and thoughts. Furthermore, they compete in their conversations for the wittiest comment, so at a communist party meeting:

> Krantz said: "These people are half right about you, Breavman. You're an emotional imperialist".
> "You thought about that for a long time, didn't you?"

> “A while”.
> “It's good”.
> They shock hand solemnly. They exchanged umbrellas. They tightened each other's ties. Breavman kissed Krantz on each cheek in the manner of a French general awarding medals. The Chairman hammered his gavel to preserve the meeting.
> “Out! We're not interested in a vaudeville show. Go perform on the mountain!” (76).

Their friendship relies, then, on their mutual artistic and spiritual interests, as well as on their 'bohemian' attitude, which makes Krantz to have “a reputation for being wild, having spotted from time to time smoking two cigarettes at once on obscure Westmount streets” (Cohen 2003: 39). However, the ultimate reason for their friendship, as Scobie suggests, is Breavman's need of an audience: “It is with Krantz that he is best able to articulate his response to life and also his response to art” (Scobie 1978: 94). In this sense, their teenage “dialogues” emerge in the first part of the novel as real trainings for Breavman's later development as an artist; his friendship with Krantz, thus, becomes the first stage of his artistic career.

However, Krantz's process of growing up into adulthood drastically differs from Breavman's; while Breavman rejects the adult world and tries to seek refuge in his art, Krantz instead accepts the rules of society and tries to find a place in it with his dedication to his job at a summer camp for adolescents. In this regard, Breavman keeps faithful to his role as 'outsider', whereas Krantz prefers to ally with the 'insiders', i.e., the conventional ones. Therefore, whereas Breavman affirms his position of 'outsider' in society, for Morley, “Breavman stays where he began in relationship to society, while advancing inward in self-knowledge. At the novel's end he is still the outsider, the critical prophet, the beautiful loser” (1972: 79); Krantz instead appears to be at the end a conventional and solid young adult who “had worked many summers at a children's camp” (Cohen 2003: 98). In Morley's words, “Krantz crosses the road, changes camps, switches allegiance” (1972: 79).

Nevertheless, it is not clear whether Krantz embraced as child and teenager the attitude of the 'outsider', in fact, as Scobie suggests, Krantz's rebellion in his teenage years looks like "the conventional rebellion of youth, a socially acceptable stage to be passed through" (Scobie 1978: 93). In this regard, Krantz gives hints throughout book one that his behaviour differs from Breavman's, so when both teenagers are engaged in the aforementioned comic dialogue at the communist rally, Krantz abruptly interrupts it because he needs to go home to study. Breavman feels betrayed, then, for the conventional behaviour of his friend, which will be later confirmed at one point of the story when Krantz leaves Montreal in order to study in England, so he expresses his desire to Breavman "to stop interpreting the world for one another" (116).

The final dissolution of their friendship occurs at the end of the novel, when Krantz returns back from England and they meet again in the Jewish camp in which he used to work during the summers. Breavman wants to resume their old dialogues, but Krantz cynically responds him, "What did you expect, Breavman, reunion on a windy hill, a knife ceremony and the exchange of blood?" (182). Breavman finds, thus, a Krantz that does not live any more in the past but in the solid present, as he recognizes: "I remember everything, Breavman. But I can't live in it" (203); this attitude contrasts of course with Breavman's obsession of returning back to childhood. In this regard, there are insurmountable differences between the two young adults, so their friendship does not seem possible anymore. Furthermore, Breavman is shocked by the way Krantz exerts his authority over the children in the summer camp:

> Krantz in the role of disciplinarian surprised Breavman. He knew Krantz had worked many summers at a children's camp, but he always thought of him (now that he examined it) as one of the children or let's say, the best child, devising grand nocturnal tricks, first figure of a follow-the-leader game through the woods.
>
> But here he was, master of the beach, bronze and squint-eyed, absolute. Children and water obeyed him. Stopping and starting the noise and

> laughter and splashing with the whistle blast, Krantz seemed to be cutting into the natural progression of time like a movie frozen into a single image and then released to run again. Breavman had never suspected him of that command (95).

Breavman finds the atmosphere that Krantz creates in the camp "obscene", but it will not be until the death of Martin -one of the boys of the camp- that their friendship will definitely cease. Martin Stark is a twelve-year-old mathematical genius, who at Breavman's eyes is "that rarest creature, a blissful mad-child" (146). Breavman feels bound to him for his condition of outsider. The boy feels alienated from the rest of the children and he is not able to conform to the rules of the camp; he prefers instead to count grass or to organize campaigns to kill mosquitoes. Breavman, who is an outsider too, becomes friends with Martin. They both share rituals and complicities, as shown in their dialogues:

> "What's your favourite store?" (…)
> "Dionne's"
> "What's your favourite parking lot?"
> "Dionne's parking lot" (152).

They do not really belong to the camp -a "microcosmos of society" (Ondaatje 1970: 35) -so they team against it and they pretend to be enemies with the rest, "keep it down, Martin, they'll kill us if they hear us" (165). They both seek isolation and a sense of disconnection from society: if Breavman is the marginalized artist, Martin is the "half-nut, half-genius" who excels in arithmetical systems. In fact, the boy is called in the novel the "divine idiot", which according to Patricia Morley, "has a long tradition in Western literature (…) and is essentially a romantic conception" (1976: 129). This "divine idiot" combines a total lack of social abilities with a brilliant and imaginative mind; he conserves, indeed, the purity that the rest of society loses in the process of growing old. In this sense, Martin's character

goes further than Breavman's, since “there is no mitigating factor such as the social 'respectability' of art” (Scobie 1978: 92), whereas, Breavman takes refuge in his role of tortured artist; but Martin, as Scobie points out, “has no such disguise” (1978: 92). Therefore, Martin's genius -rational and irrational at the same time- cannot be easily accommodated to the realms of society. Then, the boy's position in the world is much more marginal than Breavman's, so Martin is indeed what Breavman would like to be: “I enjoy his madness. He enjoys his madness. He's the only free person I've ever met. Nothing that anybody else does is as important as what he does” (Cohen 2003: 165).

Breavman's admiration for Martin leads him to encourage the boy to cultivate his difference and to not to conform to society. However, this attitude contrasts with the one of Krantz and Martin's mother, who are 'insiders' that wish to dissolute Martin's rarities in order to assimilate him into society, so he can be “integrated, inconspicuous”. Breavman and Krantz's disagreements over Martin's education show the different values they possess, whereas “Krantz defects to society as-it-is. Breavman holds out for society-as-it-should-be, City of God” (Morley 1976: 129). Therefore, Krantz firmly believes that the boy should adapt himself to the rules of the camp, but for Breavman, camp's “institutions should be constructed around him (Martin), the traditionally incoherent oracle” (146).

Nevertheless, Martin's isolation leads him ultimately to die run over by a tractor when killing mosquitoes in a marsh near the camp. This tragedy becomes inevitable, it is the highly organized society that ultimately kills him in a last effort to annihilate his creative genius, as Scobie wrote, “the society which excludes him must inevitably, even if inadvertently, kill him” (1978: 93). Martin's death impacts Breavman and leads him to leave the camp and to cease his friendship with Krantz. Furthermore, the event symbolically represents in the novel Breavman's firm rejection of the social world, which for him “has been destroyed irrevocably” (235) with the death of the young boy. Breavman confirms this destruction at Martin's funeral; in his letter to Shell he writes:

> I went to a funeral today. It was no way to bury a child. His real death contrasted violently with the hush-hush sacredness of the chapel. The beautiful words didn't belong on the rabbi's lips. I don't know if any modern man is fit to bury a person. The family's grief was real, but the air-conditioned chapel conspired against its expression. I felt lousy and choked because I had nothing to say to the corpse. When they carried away the undersized coffin I thought the boy was cheated.
> I can't claim any lesson. When you read my journal you'll see how close I am to murder. I can't even think about it or I stop moving. I mean literally. I can't move a muscle. All I know is that something prosaic, the comfortable world, has been destroyed irrevocably, and something important guaranteed (234).

The funeral becomes, then, an act of hypocrisy and materialism in which the grief of the family is sabotaged by the chapel and the words of the rabbi, which do not honour the child sincerely. The mechanisms of society to render homage to a deceased child fail; in fact, they become ignominious and frivolous despite the efforts of the community. Breavman attacks the system and with regret confirms the disappearance of the "comfortable" world, in which he does not find a place for him any more; he is out of society and can only find comfort in his art, a very romantic idea, indeed, that gives meaning to Breavman's existence.

2.3. Art, Love and Sexual Desire as Premises for Creation

Breavman's art represents in *The Favourite Game* a refuge from time, a promise for permanence. When the "comfortable" world turns into pieces, Breavman finds in art the possibility of preserving memories, magic moments, childhood friends, etc. All around him fades away: the illness and death of his father, the disappearance of his mother's beauty, the end of his childhood games, the separation from his lovers, Martin's death etc.; but as the narrator says, "if time did not pass on there would be nothing for him to preserve" (125). It emerges, thus, a paradox in Breavman's thought that

irreversibly links creation with fragmentation and destruction. Therefore, the young adolescent becomes an "archaeologist", a "keeper" of the transience of life who fights against the passage of time.

The job of the artist involves, then, the act of preservation by means of creation. At the beginning of book two, Breavman acknowledges his fascination with the pictures of Henri Rousseau, and "the way he stops time" (57). Breavman's ideal of art becomes materialized in the stasis of Rousseau's 'Forest's Landscape with Setting Sun', in which the falling man will "never reach the ground (…) comfortable in his imbalance" (Cohen 2003: 57). The painter seeks, then, to eternalize the temporal and to postpone the inevitably moment of violence in which the man falls to the ground. For Breavman, this frozen moment becomes the core of his art and life, such as he shows in the fast night car ride with his friend Krantz, in which the high speed, the pop song on the radio, and all the memories of women provide the perfect frame for "the quick freeze, the eternal case in the astral museum" (Cohen 2003: 103). Breavman, indeed, prefers to remain locked in this perfect moment of isolation from the world, rather than to acquire the different experiences that await for him in real life:

> At some point in these rides Breavman would proposition himself like this: Breavman, you're eligible for many diverse experiences in this best of all possible worlds. There are many beautiful poems which you will write and be praised for, many desolate days when you won't be able to lay pen to paper. There will be many lovely cunts to lie in, different colours of skin to kiss, various orgasms to encounter, and many nights you will walk out your lust, bitter and alone. There will be many heights of emotion, intense sunsets, exalting insights, creative pain, and many murderous plateaux of indifference where you won't even own your personal despair. There will be many good hands of power you can play with ruthlessness or benevolence, many vast skies to lie under and congratulate yourself on humility, many galley rides of suffocating slavery. This is what waits for you. Now, Breavman, here is the proposition. Let us suppose that you could spend the rest of your life exactly as you are at this very minute, in this car hurtling towards brush country, at this precise stop on the road beside a row of white

> guide posts, always going past these posts at eighty, this jukebox song of rejection pumping, this particular sky of clouds and stars, your mind including this immediate cross-section of memory -- which would you choose?
> Fifty more years of this car ride, or fifty more of achievement and failure?
> And Breavman never hesitated in his choice (101).

In this regard, Breavman's desire for stasis resembles to the poem 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1820), in which John Keats reflects on art, the transience of life, and posterity. Then, Canadians maybe desperate for a Keats, as Breavman ironically suggests, but he is in fact desperate for the immortality of the Grecian Urn.

The inevitably decay that Breavman wants to postpone is shown in the deterioration of the bodies of the novel: "His mother mourns the loss of the 'real face' of her youth; the body of Breavman's dead rat fertilizes the pansies; and the aged father's swollen body has somehow replaced the strong firm body which once waded up rivers in tubber boots" (Morley 1976: 132). Breavman learns as a child with his father's dead that there is no possible scientific achievement to stop ageing and death. Furthermore, the young artist knows that it is not only that things decay, they themselves contain decay, so "the monuments were made of worms" (Cohen 2003: 141).

In this deterioration, the leitmotiv of the scars plays an important role in the novel. Scars might be visible -such as the ones in Shell's earlobes- or they might be invisible, for example, such as the one that Martin's death leaves in Breavman's self. The book opens with a discussion on the nature of scars, which they romantically appear as "the proud scars of combat" (Cohen 2003: 7); whether they are secrets for lovers to reveal, medals for children to show, or in their less heroic connotations, they simply acknowledge the relentless passage of time, such as the one of Breavman's mother, "His mother regarded her whole body as a scar grown over some earlier perfection which she sought in mirrors and windows and hub-caps" (7).

The rich imagery of scars in the novel suggest Breavman's failure in his attempt to preserve life; on the contrary, he realizes that a scar is "what

happens when the word is made flesh (7). The phrase holds biblical connotations that remind of Breavman's own writing, but it emphasizes in fact Breavman's potential for leaving scars in the bodies of those he loves. In this sense, "when Breavman attempts to realize the image of himself as artist in the flesh of his human relationships, the results are always scars. Mist may leave no scars, but Breavman cannot" (Scobie 1978: 76). Therefore, Breavman as artist leaves scars in the bodies of his lovers and friends; his power is indeed the one of the poet who wounds and brands his mark, but then he must depart "As the mist leaves no scar / On the dark green hill" (Cohen 2003: 1).

However, these verses from *The Spice-Box of Earth* that appear as the epigraph in *The Favourite Game* acquire a different connotation in the novel, since it is not possible for Breavman to leave his relationships without causing a scar. In fact, the verses contradict the desire that he expresses to his first lover Tamara, "I want to touch people like a magician, to change them or hurt them, leave my brand, make them beautiful" (101). Therefore, even if Breavman wants to preserve life, he feels attraction for the powers of the artistic profession, indeed, he already experiments with them in his childhood in the form of games.

According to Scobie, games are "controlled initiations into reality" (1978: 78), but the child Breavman does not truly learn to separate them from real life. On the contrary, her playmate Lisa is already aware of both dimensions when she is willing to be naked in the game of 'The Soldier and The Whore', but she makes Krantz and Breavman to turn their heads when she is putting her dress on once the game is over: "Now outside of the game, she made them turn while she put on her dress" (18). The game provides a space for idealization in which, "Whores were ideal women just as soldiers were ideal men" (28); furthermore, its fictitious nature prevents the emergence of scars, so "the welts dance all over Lisa's imaginary body" (Cohen 2003: 14). Breavman wants, then, to extend the game forever, he wants to gain its control but looking amazed at Lisa's naked body, he becomes conscious of his own sexuality and he forgets about the game, so he "didn't take his turn whipping" (15):

> She had to take off her top, too, and the cot disappeared from under her and she floated in the autumnal gloom of the garage, two feet above the stone floor. Oh my, my, my. Breavman didn't take his turn whipping. There were white flowers growing out of all her pores. [...]
> "She's perfect, Krantz, didn't you see?" Krantz plugged his ears with his forefingers. They passed Bertha's Tree. Krantz began to run. "She was really perfect, you have to admit it, Krantz." Krantz was faster (14).

Therefore, when Breavman is confronted with sexuality, he loses the control of the game and Lisa reacts annoyed, so she decides to end the game: "What's the matter with him? I'm getting dressed" (15). The children discover, then, the "games of flesh, love, curiosity" (24), such as in another significant episode when both Lisa and Breavman enter into the maid's room and discover a hand-viewed film that shows them "a demonstration of the grand, democratic, universal practice of physical love" (27) After watching the film the children are both intrigued, even Breavman sentences, "if this is the way things are, then why is anybody working?" (28).

Nevertheless, Lisa's first period and Breavman's discovery of masturbation will put an end to their childhood games, as well as their friendship will get inevitably colder. Breavman continues to explore his sexuality as a teenager, whereas at the same time he becomes aware of his creative powers when he discovers the art of the hypnosis. The young Breavman decides to hypnotize Heather, the family maid, so he employs on her the techniques that he has learned from manuals. Once hypnotized, Breavman asks her to take off her clothes, she obeys, and the teenager feels "Astonished, happy, and frightened" (54). Breavman is excited about his new power, which it is indeed a metaphor for the poet's power, but he panics when Heather does not wake up when he commands her to do it; nevertheless, the situation will be resumed with Heather's awakening and her "genuine admiration" for Breavman's skills. The episode stands, then, as the ideal form of experience, so Breavman will later try to reproduce the same pattern with the rest of his lovers, but not with hypnotic techniques

but with the art of literature.

Sexuality and romantic relationships will become Breavman's sources for inspiration. Breavman's first lover is Tamara, the girl with whom the young artist starts to separate -as he will do with the rest of his lovers- the social life from the sexual one. Both lovers spent their time in a rent room isolated from the rest of the world, nobody enters into their private life:

> The bed became like a prison surrounded by electric wires. He couldn't get off it or even move. He was gnawed by the notion that this was where he belonged, right on his bed, bandaged with silence. It was what he deserved. All he was fit for" (97).

While Breavman worships Tamara's body, "How could he run from that body" (90), he fears at the same time commitment, so he tries to "put distance between himself and the hot room where he couldn't make things happen" (90); however, he fails in his attempt due to his desire of physical contact with her. When their relationship deteriorates, Breavman writes a short story to break up with her. Tamara reads Breavman's notes and she complains about her unjust portrait, which does not correspond with her real use of language:

> Tamara read it carefully.
> "But I don't talk that way," she said softly.
> "Neither do I," said Breavman.
> The act of writing had been completed when he handed her the manuscript. He no longer felt ownership.
> "But you do, Larry. You talk like both characters."
> "All right, I talk like both characters" (97).

Tamara becomes, thus, to some extent Breavman's creation in the short story, so after she reads the text their relationship gets colder and they stop

seeing each other, but they will later resume their friendship when Breavman breaks up with Shell. However, this second time Tamara seems to accept Breavman's sense of detachment, as Scobie points out: "This is a different Tamara, one who has learned, like Breavman, to hide scars. She no longer makes the kind of demand, implicit in their first relationship, which seems to threaten his commitment to loneliness" (1978: 87). The new Tamara is very similar, indeed, to Breavman, since she spends her time painting self-portraits in order to stop the passage of time:

> Tamara was a painter now, who did only self-portraits (…)
> "Why do you do only yourself?"
> "Can you think of anyone more beautiful, charming, intelligent, sensitive, etcetera?"
> "You're getting fat, Tamara."
> "So I can paint my childhood" (195).

Furthermore, Tamara acts as a sort of substitute for Breavman's former dialogues with Krantz. They create together the "Compassionate Philistines" (Cohen 2003: 195), an association that categorically excludes Krantz. For Ondaatje, in Tamara's and Breavman's dialogues, "There is the same mutual humour and vaudeville speech; Tamara, as well as being sexy, has become one of the boys" (1970: 33):

> "You know, of course, Tamara, that we're losing the Cold War?"
> "No!"
> "Plain as the nose. You know what Chinese youth are doing this very minute?"
> "Smelting pig-iron in back yards?"
> "Correct. And the Russians are learning trigonometry in kindergarten. What do you think about that, Tamara?"
> "Black thoughts" (237).

In this regard, Breavman's desperately need for an audience makes him to turn his attention back to Tamara again. It is at this point that the young artist realizes how contradictory is his inner character: on one side, he needs to withdraw from the world in order to create, but on the other hand, he looks for accomplices to display his art, whether they are Krantz, Martin, Tamara, or her perfect lover Shell. Breavman, thus, is in need of all these personal relationships, even if he ultimately abandons them.

The first sentences of *The Favourite Game* start with a girl named Shell, "whose ears were pierced so she could wear the long filigree earrings" (3). Shell's character represents perfection, she projects her beauty into everything she does:

> Some women inherit beauty as a family feature, and learn to value it slowly, as the scion of a great family becomes proud of an unusual chin because so many distinguished men bore it. And some women, Breavman thought, women like Shell, create it as they go along, changing not so much their faces as the air around them. They break down old rules of light and cannot be interpreted or compared. They make every room original (171).

Breavman's affair with Shell is narrated in the third part of the novel, when the young Breavman moves to New York to continue with his studies. At the University canteen, he sees Shell for the first time, and he experiments an unknown sensation, which is none other than the desire for comfort and rest:

> Now he was sure. It was the first thing in a long time he had learned about himself. He wanted no legions to command. He didn't want to stand on any marble balcony. He didn't want to ride with Alexander, be a boy-king. He didn't want to smash his fist across the city, lead the Jews, have visions, love multitudes, bear a mark on his forehead, look in every mirror, lake, hub-cap, for reflection of the mark. Please no. He wanted comfort. He wanted to be

comforted (158).

Nevertheless, Breavman's desire for comfort with Shell contradicts his relentless pursuit as an artist. Shell emerges, then, as the only woman of the story who is capable of making Breavman happy in the real world. She challenges Breavman's role as an artist and she is indeed capable of destroying his creative power; so Breavman feels tempted to "join the world (…) and be a citizen with a woman and a job" (Cohen 2003: 182). In this sense, Breavman finds himself trapped between his role as Artist and Lover of Shell, he feels his "Breavman eye" is in danger of sleep due to the love he feels for Shell,

> The Breavman eye, trained for volcano-watching, heavenly hosts, ideal thighs and now perfectly at work on the landscape of Shell's body, was in danger of sleep. More and more the lover had Shell to himself. These are the times Breavman does not remember too well because he was so happy" (182).

However, at the end Breavman 'the Artist' prevails over 'the Lover of Shell', and Breavman decides painfully to leave her in favour of his art since he can only create in "the lonely freedom" (Morley 1972: 80). His role as an artist becomes, thus, irreconcilable with the one of lover when Shell demands to be real. Unlike Tamara, Shell wants to break the boundaries between the private and the social, she wants to be real outside their room. She rearranges the space they share, so it reflects themselves:

> She had changed the room. They could lay their bodies in it. It was theirs, good enough for love and talk. It was not that she had arranged a stage on which they might sleep hand in hand, but she had made the room answer to what she believed their love asked. Breavman knew it was not his answer. He wished he could honour her home-making and hated his will to hurt her

for it (182).

In this regard, Shell rejects Breavman's impersonal notion of love, furthermore, she tries to "break down Breavman's imagination" (Cohen 2003: 182); she does not want to be hypnotized like Heather, or caricatured like Tamara into a short story. Although Shell enjoys the poems that Breavman writes for her, she refuses to be one of his creations, such as Tamara was once for Breavman:

> The lover must totally familiarize himself with his beloved. He must know her every movement: the motion of her buttocks when she walks, the direction of every tiny earthquake when she heaves her chest, the way her thighs spread like lava when she sits down. He must know the sudden coil her stomach makes just before the brink of climax, each orchard of hair, blonde and black, the path of pores on the nose, the chart of vessels in her eyes. He must know her so completely that she becomes, in effect, his own creation. He has moulded the shape of her limbs, distilled her smell. This is the only successful kind of sexual love: the love of the creator for his creation. In other words, the love of the creator for himself. This love can never change (95).

Shell is for Breavman the ideal subject for his poetry, "Once, for a while, he seemed to serve something other than himself. Those were the only poems he ever wrote. They were for Shell" (Cohen 2003: 175). But the poem he writes for her, which was indeed a poem from Cohen's collection "The Spice-box of Earth", seems to say more about Breavman as a lover than about Shell as the loved one:

> Beneath my hands
> your small breasts
> are the upturned bellies

of breathing fallen sparrows (175).

In fact, Breavman himself recognizes that his poems are "erotic propaganda", so he can make Shell to like her body and he can then freely dedicate to her his loving devotion. But as Scobie wrote, "This kind of devotion (…), is not love. Breavman the self-centered artist is even able to foresee 'the guilt that would nourish him if he left her' (171). Both the beauty and the fragility of the shell can be made to nourish Breavman's art" (1978: 89). Therefore, Breavman realizes that his artistic impulse is more important than his love for Shell, so the action of leaving her might help him to improve his art; while he decides to quite her side, he recognizes at the same time how Shell is not another beautiful woman to put into a pedestal, instead "he had collided with a particular person" (Cohen 2003: 80).

Shell is then in *The Favourite Game* "a particular person". She is characterized by a set of short stories that narrate episodes of her life before she met Breavman. Shell was married once to Gordon, an academic with literary pretensions that made her unhappy; both seem to enjoy an enviable marriage, but in reality Shell feels sexually frustrated due to Gordon's impotence, she blames herself for their lack of sexual encounters:

> She was ugly. Her body had betrayed her. Her breasts were fried eggs. It didn't matter what she knew about Gordon, the extent of his responsibility in the failure. It was the burden of flesh and bone and hair which she could not command perfectly. She was the woman, the bad flower, how could he be blamed?" (152).

Sex becomes, then, for Shell "the doorway to sanity and rest" (Morley 1976: 132): "Desire made her close her eyes, not for Gordon, not for a prince, but for the human man who would return her to her envelope of skin and sit beside her in the afternoon light" (Cohen 2003: 152). In revenge to her failed marriage, Shell begins an affair with a handsome young professor from

Lebanon, who has chosen the academic life since it involves the possibility of having casual sexual encounters with many young women, or "desirable little things" (Cohen 2003: 163). In fact, the professor brags about his love-making technique, which it seems actually his real occupation rather than the one of teaching. After Shell has a sexual encounter with the professor, she feels disgusted and incapable of reconciling herself with her "silly" body, but she meets then Breavman and they both laugh about the professor's phoniness and bragging. At this point, it will be Breavman's desire to make Shell feel comfortable with her body, he wants to "make her feel herself whole" (Morley 1976: 132).

Despite Shell's personal story, the narrator does not fully develop her character. In fact, Shell's former stories do not deepen into her psychology and morals; they focused instead on her beauty and her sexual frustrations with Gordon and the professor. Shell's account seems to be then at the service of Breavman, who is in charge of returning her body back, make her happy, and then leave her to pursue his artistic ambitions. In this regard, Breavman's treatment of women during the novel resembles this pattern, for example, when he meets Lisa again she is a married woman that rejects Breavman in their first encounter, but in a second meeting she confesses Breavman her marital problems and they end up having sex together, which Breavman qualifies as "weary inevitability". The same attitude underlines in Breavman's encounter with Norma, Tamara, Heather, Wanda, Patricia, etc. In this regard, Ondaatje has pointed out how "Breavman's women are in the dangerous position of becoming 'girl-toys'" (1970: 30), since the young artist does not take any of his lovers seriously. Breavman uses women for his own fantasies and creations, for example, he imagines how his former maid Heather longs for him once she leaves the household:

> Where are you, Heather, why didn't you stay to introduce me into the warm important rites? I might have gone straight. Poemless, a baron of industry, I might have been spared the soft-cover books on rejection-level stabilization by wealthy New York analysts. Didn't you feel good when I brought you out? Sometimes Breavman likes to think that she is somewhere in the world,

not fully awake, sleeping under his power. And a man in a tattered uniform asks:

"Where are you, Heather?" (56).

Breavman creates, then, an ideal world in which he has control over Heather's feelings, he plays games to imagine alternative worlds that suit his views. In this games, the artist leaves his print in white canvases that he ultimately abandons. In Scobie words:

> The essence of the game may be stated thus: you start with a field of snow; something white, blank, unmarked. The possible analogies are obvious enough in the book: the artist confronting the white sheet of paper, or two people meeting for the first time, their relationship still open to all potentialities. Then, acting on this blankness, violently imposing your will upon it, you create an image. The more distorted, grotesque and "crazy" the image is, the more beautiful it is. Then you walk away and leave it; you break the connection, leaving nothing real or permanent of yourself behind. The image created is as beautiful as a flower, but only because you have abandoned it, breaking off the "footprint stems" (1978: 77).

Breavman is going to attempt to create beautiful images, which he will later abandon to restart again his game. The notion of game is close, then, to the one of art in *The Favourite Game*, so at the end of the novel Breavman remembers what was Lisa's favourite game:

> Jesus! I just remembered what Lisa's favourite game was. After a heavy snow we would go into a back yard with a few of our friends. The expanse of snow would be white and unbroken. Bertha was the spinner. You held her hands while she turned on her heels, you circled her until your feet left the ground. Then she let go and you flew over the snow. You remained still in whatever position you landed. When everyone had been flung in this

> fashion into the fresh snow, the beautiful part of the game began. You stood up carefully, taking great pains not to disturb the impression you had made. Now the comparisons. Of course you would have done your best to land in some crazy position, arms and legs sticking out. Then we walked away, leaving a lovely white field of blossom-like shapes with footprint stems (244).

When Breavman remembers Lisa's game, he is sitting in a cafeteria in Montreal; he has just ended his relationships with Krantz and Shell, and he seems to have accepted isolation as the natural condition of the artist. He writes in a napkin his memories about Lisa's favourite game -the napkin stands as a symbol for marginal writing (Greenstein 1989: 126)-, which coincide with Scobie's former lines about Breavman's art. Therefore, Lisa's favourite game may represent the last example of the artistic experience in the form of games, in Morley's words, "The childhood game is the novel's final metaphor for the stasis, the immortalizing permanence of art" (1976: 135). The field of snow represents, then, the canvas in which the children leave their mark, the "blossom-like shapes with footprint stems" (Cohen 2003: 244) which they leave behind in the stasis of the moment, such as Breavman leaves Shell and the rest of his lovers. Furthermore, when Breavman remembers Lisa's game he goes back again to his childhood and recalls the innocence of his games, he recreates a mythic past that already belongs to his imaginary as an artist.

Breavman's favourite game at the end of the novel seems clear, in Morley's words, "The creating of art, then, is Breavman's favourite game. And Cohen's?" (1976: 134). The end of *The Favourite Game* features a Breavman who is ready to confront his destiny as an artist, "Breavman is alone, ready to go on, like Stephen Daedelus, the artificer, being nurtured by the past he loves and has rejected" (Ondaatje 1970: 35). In this sense, other critics like Greenstein suggest that perhaps Breavman's favourite game is neither love nor art, but exile:

> While this favourite game has been variously interpreted as love, truth, or

> art, it also symbolizes the process of exile from origins through intermediate stems to marginality. Exiled from childhood, the young man seeks to reclaim his past; exiled from society, the authentic Jew, educated in the alien experience of a solitary man in a desert, begs for bodies; and further exiled from society, the artist traces words, prints, stems, figures in a wintry ground or snowy desert. Far-flung from his family tree, the outsider has to graft his stem, disseminated, the poet traces word stems, conjugates verbs and lovers (1989: 126).

Breavman, thus, represents throughout the novel the individual that once he has made his mark, he needs to leave and seek refuge in exile in order to preserve his self-constitution as an artist. He is the exiled poet in search of new landscapes, lovers, adventures, etc.; however, it is rather improbable that he will manage to live outside the society, since this feat seems to be only destined to the saints of Cohen's next works *Flowers for Hitler* and *Beautiful Losers*.

2.4. *The Favourite Game*: A Recapitulation

The Favourite Game narrates the story and the process of maturity into adulthood of a young artist from Montreal that ultimately abandons his community in order to live under the promise of free-will. The novel shares multiple parallelisms with James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* since they are both modern narrations that adopt the romantic form of the *Künstlerroman* -a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman* that narrates the creative awakening and the discovery of the artistic vocation of a young artist-. The romantic background of the novel coexists with Breavman's ironic attitude, who often jokes about his own romanticism and artistic ambitions; nevertheless, Breavman is still a romantic who idealizes childhood and romance.

Lawrence Breavman is the fictional alter ego of Leonard Cohen, who gives an account of his childhood and youthful memories in Montreal and New York; the book is, then, a sort of autobiography narrated in the third person.

In fact, there are many characters of the novel inspired by Cohen's friends and family, such as the protagonist's best friend 'Krantz' resembles the sculptor Mort Rosengarten, and 'Shell' was inspired by Cohen's first girlfriend Georgianna Sherman. In this regard, Carmen Ellison with the article "Not My Real Face" and many other critics have explored Cohen's personal implication in the novel as a "thinly veiled autobiography" (McFarlane 1999: 73).

The novel is still modernist, but it employs techniques of intertextuality, self-reflexibility, and characterization that remind of a postmodernist sensibility; it also includes meta-reflections on the creative process, as well as structures of auto-referentiality such as the mise *en abyme*. Nevertheless, the novel is self-reflexive in content but not in form; it does not deepen, thus, into the realms of metafiction in contrast with Cohen's second novel *Beautiful Losers*.

The plot of the novel is almost non-existent; the text deals instead with different moments in the life of the artist from the 1940's to the 1950's. In this regard, the book contains four parts in which the reader gets to know Breavman as a child and adolescent; it explores the protagonist's obsessions, concerns, relationships, etc. These episodes employ a cinematic imagery that constructs Breavman's portrait. The novel appears, then, as a set of scenes in which Breavman plays the protagonist role. On the other hand, this cinematic imagery connects *The Favourite Game* with other literary works of the time, such as *The Catcher in the Rye* and *On the Road*; indeed, this last work relates Cohen with countercultural movements like the Beats, who were like Cohen interested in the exploration of the self and in the undertaking of a creative and religious quest.

The novel emerges as a central text to understand Cohen's Jewish-Canadian identity as an artist; it explores the city of Montreal, New York, and the natural spaces of Canada. Furthermore, the novel offers a decadent portrait of Canada as a nation of conformists and conventional bourgeois worried about business instead of religion. Breavman reacts against this environment by embracing the life of the bohemian artist. He betrays his community and family -who expect him to become a prosperous businessman and to follow the family tradition- and searches for new role

models. In this regard, Breavman finds a refuge in art and romantic relationships. He becomes the romantic artist of his community, but at the same time he feels very conscious about his image and work, which often mocks it with irony; nevertheless, as a great romantic, he still wonders about nature and longs for a return to childhood.

Breavman's evolution during the novel contrasts with the one of his friend Krantz, who ultimately turns into a conventional young adult who works at a summer camp and has a girlfriend. Krantz is, then, absorbed by the system; whereas Breavman remains as the outsider and rebel of the community. The separation of the two friends and the ending of their friendship will be precipitated by Martin's death at the summer camp –a young boy and mathematical genius run over by a tractor in a marsh-; Breavman, who was a close friend of Martin is deeply affected by the tragic event, so he ends leaving the summer camp and certifies with the death of the young boy the ending of "the conventional world".

Breavman not only finds in art a refuge from "the conventional world" but from time; in fact, art provides him the illusion of permanence. In this sense, Breavman desperately seeks throughout the novel to stop time and to make moments eternal; he stops family movies and he tries to preserve all the memories of his childhood and adolescence, such as playing with Lisa in the snow or driving with Krantz in the streets of Montreal. Nevertheless, Breavman acknowledges decay in the destruction of the bodies in the novel: from the death of his father at an early age to the ageing face of her mother and the scars of her body. In this regard, scars become an important symbol in the novel that confirm deterioration; they certify Breavman's failure in his attempt to preserve life. But scars do not only damage physical appearance, since they might be invisible such as the one that Martin leaves in Breavman when he dies. Furthermore, Breavman himself brands his lovers with scars when he ultimately abandons them in favour of his art.

As a young adult, Breavman cannot rely anymore on the games of his childhood, which he used to explore the world of feelings without hurting no one, such as he did with Lisa in "The Soldier and the Whore". Nevertheless, adolescence and the discovery of sexuality interrupt these games and Breavman loses control over them. It is at this point when the

young artist becomes involved in romantic relationships in which he separates the social life from the sexual one, so he can control his involvement in them and preserve a sense of detachment that allows him to leave his lovers once the artistic duty calls him. In this regard, lovers provide him with artistic inspiration, but he needs to leave them in order to continue his spiritual quest.

Breavman even leaves 'Shell', the young woman he meets at Columbia and he calls “the perfect wife”. She is an individual capable of making him to abandon the life of the artist in order to become a conventional citizen. Indeed, Shell is not another lover in *The Favourite Game* but the protagonist of her own story in the third part of the novel, where the reader gets to know her relationship with her husband Gordon and her occasional affair with a University teacher from Lebanon. Therefore, Shell is not for Breavman another beautiful woman to put into a pedestal, but a “particular person”.

However, it is arguable Cohen's treatment of female characters in the novel, who appear to be mostly at the service of the protagonist, so even Shell's story seems to be at Breavman's disposal. Anyway, Breavman's ultimate goal seems always the creation of beautiful images in order to leave them later, so women become the perfect inspiration that he ultimately abandons. At the end of the novel, Breavman sits in a cafeteria once he has ceased his relationships with both Shell and Krantz; he is alone but still preserves his memories in exile and a promise of free will. He is an artist ready to undertake a new journey.

CHAPTER III:

Flowers for Hitler: From Romance to the Concentration Camp

The following chapter features Cohen's volume of poetry *Flowers for Hitler* (1964) as the new direction that the Canadian artist followed in his artistic production: from the romantic verses of his youth to a social 'I' that explores the nature of evil in modern society. Nevertheless, the collection includes different kinds of poetry that complete Cohen's artistic portrait.

The chapter is divided into five sections: 'The Volume of *Flowers for Hitler*', 'The Mask of the Anti-Poet', 'Evil is All Around', 'The Saints of Modernity', and '*Flowers for Hitler: A Recapitulation*'. Section one discusses Cohen's new direction in poetry -a change in style, language, and themes-; it emphasizes Cohen's new anti-poetic attitude, it discusses Cohen's use of the Holocaust as a metaphor of evil in the twentieth century, and it introduces in connection with Cohen's second novel *Beautiful Losers* (1966) the concept of 'the saint' in the Montreal artist's production. Section two -The Mask of the Anti-Poet'- analyses those poems of the collection that deepen into the author's rejection of poetry as a source of beauty. It also explores Cohen's satirical poems, as well as the poet's concerns about the social, political, and cultural context of Canada and abroad. Then, section three places the focus on the poet's concept of evil; the poet uses Nazi imagery, Hitler's figure, and the event of the Holocaust as a metaphor of terror in the twentieth-century. Nevertheless, evil adopts different forms and reaches the domestic and psychological realm. The section discusses also the nature of evil as a part of humankind, which for the poet is present everywhere. Section four begins

exploring the parallelisms that exist between *Flowers for Hitler* and *Beautiful Losers*. It deepens into Cohen's concept of the 'Beautiful Loser' and analyses those poems of historical figures such as Queen Victoria, Irving Layton, or Alexander Trocchi, which are the 'new saints' in Cohen's production. The section includes as well those romantic poems of the collection that still make of Cohen 'the golden-boy' in Canadian letters. Finally, section five summarizes and gathers the main ideas of the text.

3.1. The Volume of *Flowers for Hitler*

Flowers For Hitler (1964) represents a change of direction in Cohen's poetry; his former volumes *Let Us Compare Mythologies* (1956) and *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961) were the product of a young romantic poet who carefully constructed his verses to express themes around love, lust, tradition, religious feeling, etc. The lyricism of these volumes was outstanding: a sensuous and exuberant language was accompanied by traditional forms like the ballad; the poems were not innovative but certainly beautiful. Cohen's poetry was closer to the English romantics of the nineteenth century rather than to the experimentalism that contemporary poets in the USA and Great Britain were practising in the 1960's. Nevertheless, the Canadian scene and particularly the Montreal group were still writing poems of a more conservative nature, so Cohen's new volume supposed an attempt to move beyond this tradition in order to find new paths to express his artistic and individual aspirations.

In *Flowers for Hitler,* the result of this desire to move away from the poetry that made of Cohen 'the golden boy' in the Canadian literary scene is debatable; some critics like Milton Wilson spoke of Cohen in the July 1965 issue of the *Toronto Quarterly* as:

> Potentially the most important writer that Canadian poetry has produced since 1950-not merely the most talented, but also, I would guess, the most professionally committed to making the most of his talent. What we get in a great deal of *Flowers for Hitler* is the returning of a virtuoso instrument,

> elaborate mnemonic devices, a series of techniques for the extraction of selves, a disciplined fulfilling of irrational tasks, a combination of derangement and restoration within the poetic process (as cited in Simmons 2012: 119).

This positive reaction towards *Flowers for Hitler* was shared by the literary scene of Canada, who awarded him with the Quebec Literary Award in 1964; nonetheless, other critics like Ondaatje expressed their disappointment with Cohen's new direction: "Too often we are bored by *Flowers for Hitler,* and that is any artist's most severe fault -whether he is a realist or romantic or academic or nihilist" (1970: 44). It was Cohen himself who announced, indeed, this change of style with a short note published on the dust jacket of the book:

> This book moves me from the world of the golden-boy poet into the dung pile of the front-line writer. It didn't plan it this way. I loved the tender notices *Spice-Box* got but they embarrassed me a little. *Hitler* won't get the same hospitality from the papers. My sounds are too new, therefore people will say: this is derivative, this is slight, his power has failed. Well, I say that there has never been a book like this, prose or poetry, written in Canada. All I ask is that you put it in the hands of my generations and it will be recognized (as cited in Scobie 1978: 44).

Despite the fact that the above lines were written in a private letter that Cohen addressed to his editor Jack McClelland, the Canadian publisher decided to publish them in order to explain Cohen's change of style. However, Cohen would later regret the flamboyant style that he used in his missives, "I got into the habit of writing him these highly charged self-promotional letters about how important a writer I was, and he used one of them" (as cited in Ruhlmann 1993). In fact, the discussion about this note was not the only one that editor and poet held about the publication of *Flowers for Hitler.* In this regard, Cohen accepted to change the name of the

volume initially called 'Opium and Hitler', but he did not agree with the design of the front cover that showed his face superimposed in the body of a naked woman, "Nobody is going to buy a book the cover of which is a female body with my face for tits (…) The picture is simply offensive. It is dirty in the worst sense. It hasn't the sincerity of a stag movie or the imagination of a filthy postcard or the energy of a real surrealist humour" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 117), wrote Cohen in one of his letters to McClelland.

Nevertheless, the front cover was changed and the book was finally published with success in the autumn of 1964. In order to promote it, Cohen participated along with the poets Irving Layton, Earle Birney, and Phyllis Gotlieb in numerous poetry readings organized by Canadian universities. He was interviewed by newspapers, radios and televisions, and he adopted according to Ondaatje, "a public rather than a private rhetoric" (1970: 35). Cohen was becoming, thus, a new poet very conscious of his public persona.

It is undeniable that Cohen's new poems represent a radical change in his style: from traditional forms that remind of the English poetry of the nineteenth century with regular metrics and abundant rhymes, Cohen moves to a free verse mixed with genres like prose and drama. However, it is perhaps Cohen's new use of language what most surprised his readers once the volume was published; the former sensuality and lyricism of *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and *The Spice-Box of Earth* was run over by a deliberately ugly and prosaic language; a language used to describe a vulgar reality far away from the encounters between lovers of Cohen's former poetry. Cohen was facing in *Flowers for Hitler,* thus, the modern world with a renovated style that included a contemporary use of language and a less formal poetic structure, whereas he abandoned at the same time the romantic and sometimes heroic verses of his previous collections.

The harshness of style in *Flowers for Hitler* makes the poems not always pleasant to read. In fact, critics like Ondaatje do not hesitate to label some of the pieces of the collection as very bad poetry:

> There are nearly a hundred poems in *Flowers for Hitler:* about forty good

> ones. Cohen himself chose fifty-five for his *Selected Poems.* Most of the bad qualities (…) could have been avoided by careful or less egotistical editing. Layton has made it fashionable to print all, saying time will pick the good poems anyway, but it seems pointless to waste everyone's time with poems that are obviously poor or obviously just private jokes (1970: 43).

But the fact that the collection might contain bad poems does not automatically condemn *Flowers for Hitler* to futility, for critics like Scobie, "what matters is that the whole stance of the book is directed *against* writing formally 'good' poems" (1978: 45). The volume appears, then, as a stance of the poet who does not believe in poetry anymore. It is the discourse of the anti-poet the one that Cohen voluntary adopts. Therefore, instead of a collection of well tied poetry capable of moving the sensitive reader, *Flowers for Hitler* wants to impact the reader with its deliberately ugliness and banality, so she or he might put into question the meaning and function of art and poetry.

To Cohen's change of style should be added the new treatment that he gives to the themes he deals with in the collection. Whereas on one side he recovers former subjects of *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and *The Spice-Box of Earth,* such as love, sex, relationships between teacher and pupil, as well as violence and murder; the book adds new subjects concerned with the social realities and conflicts of the twentieth century, such as the Cold War, Nazism and the Holocaust, the Police Gazette, Canada, etc. However, these themes are often "suspended and weightless" (Rodriguez 1976: 66) in the collection, so Cohen does not face them neither with historical rigour, nor with the expected seriousness presupposed when dealing with terrible events such as the Holocaust. In fact, Eli Mandel asked Cohen about the recurrent image of concentration camps in his poetry, "The concentration camp is an obsessive image with you. This image appears all through your work. Why is that?", to which the Canadian poet did not hesitate to respond with a provocative stance, "Well, cos I wish they'd let me out" (as cited in Ondaatje 1970: 35).

Thus, the reader is inevitably challenged by the informality that Cohen adopts when he speaks about the horrors of Nazism, so some critics like

Abraham have interpreted this position in the light of satire, "Suffering and finality are handled with a casualness so disarming as to be satirical" (1996), or as Ruth Wisse writes, "*Flowers for Hitler* advertises Cohen's readiness to joke about the moral categories of good and evil, villainy and martyrdom" (1995: 32). However, other critics like Sandra Djawa had accused the book of sensationalism, she questions indeed "the integrity of Cohen's vision" when coming into terms with the painful experience of the Holocaust (1967: 41). The critic Laurenz Volkmann shares the same opinion, he wrote:

> A collection entitled *Flowers for Hitler* includes only scattered and seemingly frivolous poetic fragments directly referring to the title's alleged topic. Or Cohen, in the few striking instances in which he directly treats the topic of Nazism or the Holocaust, shoehorns semiotically highly charged *topoi* of the Holocaust into a simulacrum of *fleurs-du-mal* imagery, with this randomness and unconnectedness creating a scandalous and provocative effect (2003: 210).

Whether Cohen's use of the Holocaust represents a lack of respect or not, it seems that the Nazi terror is not the theme of the book but the vehicle that the artist adopts to explore the self and his surrounding reality. This is the opinion of Collin Hill in his dissertation *Leonard Cohen's Live in Art: The Story of the Artist in his Novels, Poems and Songs*, in which he affirms, "Cohen's treatment of the Holocaust could be said to exploit the victimization of others for the sake of fulfilling a tempting creative potential" (1996: 71). Then, what Hill suggests is that Cohen uses the Holocaust tragedy and borrows its images in order to develop himself as an artist, so he can study in depth his own persona, though at the expense of "the suffering of the millions of dead who provide him with a convenient backdrop for his story of the artist-life" (Hill 1996: 72). A similar opinion is held by Sandra Wynands, her approach does not condemn but celebrates Cohen's treatment of the Holocaust as an effective way to alienate the reader with an unpleasant prose that makes her or him question the work of art and the

roles of the reader and writer. Cohen's approach to the Holocaust is subordinated to the artist's concept of creation, so the Nazi Horror is as aforementioned not the real subject of the book, but the vehicle that Cohen uses to explore the self and the process of artistic creation. In Wynand's words,

> Cohen brings his own concept of artistic creation along and imposes it on his treatment of his topic. The book's aesthetic is as such only partly determined by the subject matter. Rather, the subject matter lends itself to such a treatment as Cohen has chosen, but it is at least partly used as a vehicle for Cohen's own self-presentation and his concept of artistic creation. Once again Cohen finds his literary forebears in the Decadents, who also set up their own lives as antitheses to bourgeois sensibilities (1999).

In this regard, Cohen adopts a decadent stance in *Flowers for Hitler* closed to the tradition of Black Romanticism that Sandra Djawa pointed out in his article "Leonard Cohen: Black Romantic", in which she draws parallelisms between the works of Cohen and other decadent writers such as Baudelaire, Genet, Rimbaud, etc. Cohen focuses, then, as the aforementioned writers do, on the most sordid, violent, and dark aspects of human nature. Then, the Nazi terror emerges in *Flowers for Hitler* as the perfect twentieth century metaphor for the poet's negative feelings and attitudes towards the social and artistic reality in which he lives. But as he himself recognizes in the first page of the volume with "A Note on the Title" -a short comment written in the form of a poem to present his work-:

> A
> while ago
> this book would
> have been called
> SUNSHINE FOR NAPOLEON

and earlier still it
would have been called
WALLS FOR GENGHIS KHAN (Cohen 2011: 7).

This comment reinforces the hypothesis that the Holocaust in *Flowers for Hitler* is a mere metaphor for the capacity of evil that humans possess and have possessed throughout history. It could be, then, a book dedicated to Napoleon, Khan, etc. But since Cohen wrote these poems in the 1960's, it is reasonable for him to go back to Nazism in order to illustrate what he claims to be the topic of the book:

> Levi is saying, what point is there to a political solution of, in the homes, these tortures and mutilations continue? That's what *Flowers for Hitler* is all about. It's taking the mythology of the concentration camps and bring it into the living room and saying, 'This is what we do to each other'. We outlaw genocide and concentration camps and gas and that, but if a man leaves his wife or they are cruel to each other, then that cruelty is gong to find a manifestation if he has a political capacity; and he has. There's no point in refusing to acknowledge the wrathful deities. That's like putting pants on the legs of pianos like the Victorians did. The fact is that we all succumb to lustful thoughts, to evil thoughts, to thoughts of torture (as cited in Simmons 2012: 119).

These words were uttered by Cohen in an interview with Sandra Djawa for the University of British Columbia's student paper. He confirms the idea that evil is not exclusive of Nazism, but it is instead present in all humans as part of their nature. Furthermore, Cohen included in *Flowers for Hitler* the words of the concentration-camp survivor Primo Levi as the epigraph of the book, who expresses this feeling again in the following warning:

> If from the inside of the lager, a message
> could have seeped out to free men, it would
> have been this: Take care not to suffer in
> your own homes what is inflected on us here (as cited in Ondaatje 1970: 38).

Levi's epigraph indicates how terror is not only perpetrated by Nazis on concentration camps, it is inflicted instead by all humans in the domestic realm, so in the form of warning what Levi wants to combat with his words is "the decline of personality" that led Jews to their extermination by hands of the Nazis. This need to fight victimization is what perhaps Cohen wanted to imply with his daring response to Eli Mendel's question about the images of concentration camps in his poetry. In this regard, the Nazi oppression over the Jews should not be treated for Cohen as something unique, but as another episode of terror in the course of history. Then, when he affirms, "I wish they'd let me out", Cohen might be asking indeed for the disappearance of a special treatment for Jewish victims; or on the other hand, he might just wanted to produce controversy and scandal.

However, Cohen was never unlike Primo Levi in a concentration camp, so this is why his words sound frivolous. The fact that he denies a special treatment for the Holocaust has been criticized by academics like Michael Greenstein, who believes that:

> Although most theologians have insisted on the uniqueness of the Holocaust as an extreme instance of malice and atrocity, Cohen implies that evil is relative, part of a historical continuum. Even if Cohen's note is ironic, nevertheless the casual "while ago" and the links with Napoleon and a remote Genghis Khan deny the singular, unprecedented nature of Hitler's methods (1987: 6).

This comment about the need to treat the Holocaust as an unprecedented and singular event of terror in the course of history coincides with Adorno's famous claim in his essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" (1951) about the

impossibility of writing poems after Auschwitz, “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (1967: 34). Adorno believed that the tremendous horror of the Nazi repression prevented artists from poetic creation, who could not write about the tragedy without neglecting the terrible events, “by becoming a subject in art, the Holocaust is deprived of its horrifying singularity” (Wynand 1999: 199). Therefore, aesthetic pleasure seemed to have ended for Adorno, but this thought was inevitably challenged by poems about the Holocaust such as Paul Celan's “Todesfuge” (1948), an extremely poignant piece that takes to an extreme the capacity of poetry to confront the most frighting reality. Celan, who answered Adorno's famous remark with the affirmation that at least in poetry “we know at last where to seek the barbarians” (as cited in Glenn 1973: 73), managed to produce an aesthetic pleasure, whereas at the same time, he made a moving reflection about the terrible events of the Holocaust.

Furthermore, not all theologians and philosopher's agreed with the singularity of Greenstein's view about the Holocaust; for example, the controversial essays of the German philosopher Hannah Arendt “Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil”, published in the New Yorker as series in 1963, treat the Holocaust as a phenomenon of the banal. In Stevie E. Ascheim words, “Arendt argued that [the Holocaust’s] evil was not the outcome of a superior will to power or demonism but originated under rather trivial conditions, in some respect in a sphere of action that lay below moral considerations” (as cited in Ward 2008: 225). The same opinion seems to share the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who believes that the Holocaust is the manifestation of a phenomenon rooted in modernity, so it might be repeated again if caution disappears:

> The truth is that every 'ingredient' of the Holocaust -- all those things that rendered it possible -- was normal (...) in the sense of being fully in keeping with everything we know about our civilization, its guiding spirit, its priorities, its immanent vision of the world (...)” (2013: 8).

In the analysis that the critic Wynands does on Bauman's words, both Cohen and the Polish sociologist share the idea that evil is relative, so it is a part of human nature:

> Bauman reveals the Holocaust to be not a relapse into barbarism as was commonly believed but an outgrowth of modern culture, if not its continuation (110). The Holocaust took neither madmen nor a degenerate society. In their own ways, both Cohen and Bauman arrive at the realization that in order to come to terms with the Holocaust, the conditions that brought it about have to be accepted as part of everyday life (Wynands 1999).

Bauman believes as well in the utilitarian choice of the victims of the Holocaust, who prefer to survive rather than to rebel against the Nazis:

> At all stages of the Holocaust (…) the victims were *confronted with a choice* (…) They could not choose between good and bad situations, but they could at least choose between greater and lesser evil (Bauman 2013: 270).

In this sense, Cohen had introduced already in *The Spice-Box of Earth* the idea of the Jewish victimization in poems like "The Genius", in which he overtly speaks about the stereotypes that led Jewish people to their extermination; nevertheless, it is in *Flowers for Hitler* where the poet confirms this view with poems in which there is no distinction between victims and victimizers, Nazi leaders become average people instead of monsters, and the poet himself claims not to be a "beleaguered Jew, Cohen begins to see himself as simply part of a flawed and often vicious humanity" (Ward 2008: 70). He universalizes, then, guilt and "extends through satire the argument, not that *all Germans* are responsible, but that *all men* are responsible for what happened in the concentration camps" (Woodcock 1976: 159). In this regard, the title of the book confirms this attitude by rendering flowers to Hitler -if

humankind is violent, Hitler is then the epitome of it- so the poet gives him flowers as an accomplice gesture.

The Auschwitz that Cohen depicts in *Flowers for Hitler* does not coincide, then, with the historical oppression suffered by the Jews; it is instead a creation of the author in which the Holocaust is the metaphor that expresses Cohen's ideas about humankind. These ideas are dark and sordid, closely connected with the works of the aforementioned dark romantic writers. Cohen is, thus, in *Flowers for Hitler* the "chronicler of the dark side of life" (Wynands 1999). But if *Flowers for Hitler* is not read as a personal stance of the author but in the light of historical events, it can only be possibly done with sarcasm, since Cohen was never directly involved in the Holocaust and his vision is hence partial. In this regard, Cohen's extravagant and grotesque acceptance of cruelty and suffering, as well as his playful exploration of violence are probably part of his poetic intention of destroying style, just as he "turns against conventional 'poetic' gestures" (Scobie 1978: 48), he perpetrates "gestures against history" (Scobie 1978: 52). Therefore, what Cohen seeks with his treatment of the Holocaust, as well as with his new adopted anti-style is to shock the reader, to make her or him question the role of literature after the Holocaust with "aesthetics and moral inversions" (Wynands 1999).

In order to create this new anti-style and reverse the reader's aesthetic and moral categories, Cohen opts for surrealist images, symbolism, absurd expressions, and experimental techniques such as the addition of long lists, dates, footnotes, diary-entries, etc. The result is a melting pot with no meaning at all but in the poet's claim for no style. As Wilson wrote originally in the July 1965 issue of the *Toronto Quarterly,* it is "a book about the problem of style" (Reprinted in 1976: 21). This intention to end with style foreshadows Cohen's second novel *Beautiful Losers,* but the parallelisms between these two works do not end in the experimental techniques that Cohen uses in both books; in fact, many of the themes and ideas of *Flowers for Hitler* will be later developed in *Beautiful Losers,* such as the figure of the beautiful loser who embraces terror in order to transcended it and achieve sainthood, as Ondaatje points out, Cohen in *Flowers for Hitler* "begins to make heroes and saints out the perverse. He joins hands with the outsiders,

(...)" (1970: 39).

The poems of *Flowers for Hitler* can be read, then, as a prelude of the themes and techniques that the reader will find later in *Beautiful Losers.* In this sense, the lyric form seems to restrict the possibilities that prose gives Cohen to explore the new themes in the realms of history, i.e., to expand his own interests. In Scobie's words, "the themes with which Cohen was working at that time were more suitable for dramatic than for lyrical presentation: i.e., that *Beautiful Losers* was the only satisfactory resolution of *Flowers for Hitler*" (1978: 58). These words are already suggesting Cohen's shift from poet to novelist, so it will be in *Beautiful Losers* where he achieves the full development of his themes and artistic persona; the novel represents, thus, probably Cohen's most important achievement in his literary career.

But the publication of *Beautiful Losers* could not have been possible without the previous writing of *Flowers for Hitler*, which as Eli Mandel suggested, it marked a "murderously ambiguous seduction / repulsion pattern" (as cited in *Historical Alterity,* Siemerling 1994: 413) present as well in Cohen's second novel. This pattern coincides according to Siemerling with Cohen's shift to the context of history (*Historical Alterity* 1994: 413), in which there is not only Holocaust in *Flowers for Hitler*, but a new order of historical saints -Trocchi, Queen Victoria, Irving Layton, etc.- that challenge the silence and terror of the Nazi regime. Therefore, as Ondaatje suggests, these saints become "the little revolutionary hitlers who wish to overthrow the organized, sanitized hitlers of society" (1970: 40). They are the kernel for Cohen's protagonists in *Beautiful Losers.*

This new attitude embodied in historical saints combats the silence in which the most prominent Canadian and Jewish poet A.M Klein succumbed. Cohen laments Klein's silence in his speech 'Loneliness and History' at the Montreal Jewish Public Library, in which he denounced the attitude of Jewish businessmen towards religion, who are "afraid to be lonely" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 120) and neglect the old Jewish tradition of scholars, artists and prophets. Furthermore, he enhanced the young writers and poets of the community to become -after the silence of A.M Klein-, the new "lonely witnesses and prophets" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 120) of the Jewish conscience. Therefore, in order to become a prophet and preserve his artistic

voice, Cohen decides to abandon his old lyric mode, so he can directly engage with reality. In Abraham's words,

> The transition over, the new road begun, Cohen abandons his early fixations with poetic alchemy and magic. No longer willing to be stereotyped as Jewish, as a poet, or as a Jewish-poet, Cohen claims to be attempting to move beyond influence to a more direct engagement, anti-stylistic, with his own world and experience (1996).

3.2. The Mask of the Anti-Poet

The poems of *Flowers for Hitler* combine Cohen's "earlier notions of romance with this newer vision of ashes" (Ondaatje 1970: 39), so old themes coexist with Cohen's new engagement with social reality. Then, in the collection there are romantic poems that capture the tenderness and passion of Cohen's first volume *Let Us Compare Mythologies,* but also love poems that deal with suffering and violence in the same fashion of *The Spice-Box of Earth.* In *Flowers for Hitler,* as in the former volumes, there is also self-mockery, irony, and reflections around the role of the poet; however, Cohen also attempts with this volume "a more objective art" (Pacey 1967: 15), a new direction that allows him to reflect on the twentieth century politics and society.

The collection starts with the poem "What I am doing here", an introductory piece where Cohen sets the basis for the themes and styles of *Flowers for Hitler.* The poem breaks with Cohen's former style and introduces a contemporary language far away from poetic ornament; he uses instead plain and direct words that depict images that "are no longer romantic but banal and drawn from everyday scenes, though they are still precise" (Ondaatje 1970: 37). The atmosphere is prosaic rather than romantic. Furthermore, the speaker adopts an assertive and almost authoritative tone that reminds of a political speech. The poem starts with the speaker's

recognition of his own guilt, it is a confession:

> I do not know if the world has lied
> I have lied
> I do not know if the world has conspired against love
> I have conspired against love
> The atmosphere of torture is no comfort
> I have tortured
> Even without the mushroom cloud
> still I would have hated (2011: 8).

However, the speaker is not the only one guilty in the poem but the whole world with its "atmosphere of torture" and "mushroom cloud". The world is, then, a place of evil, as Ondaatje points out, it "is not anymore an arena of romance and myth, it is instead full of evil in all its forms, from the mental to the terrifying" (1970: 36). Cohen recognizes his responsibility in this cruel society, he is an accomplice of all the pain and suffering that surrounds humankind, so he refuses to take shelter into the "universal alibi":

> Listen
> I would have done the same things
> even if there were no death
> I will not be held like a drunkard
> under the cold tap of facts
> I refuse the universal alibi (8).

Despite his confession, the speaker does not adopt a tone of surrender but rather a belligerent one. He raises his voice to invite readers to join him in the recognition of guilt, since all conspire, torture, hate, etc. Evil is, then, a fact of life that must be accepted as part of the human nature, so in admitting his own guilt, the speaker adopts a front-line position that allows him to

invite the addressee to join him in an ultimate confession:

> Like an empty telephone booth passed at night
> and remembered
> like mirrors in a movie palace lobby consulted
> only on the way out
> like a nymphomaniac who binds a thousand
> into strange brotherhood
> I wait
> for each one of you to confess (8).

However, the poet leads in these lines a position of moral superiority from which he asks his readers to confess, so far away from humbleness the speaker's claim becomes ambiguous; on one side, he confesses his own guilt, but on the other side, he believes to be free form the moral implications that this universal guilt possesses. Then, it seems that what Cohen is actually announcing with this poem is a new attitude, a pose of front-line writer "who functions as disseminator of the ugly truths of life, he can then lie back, as it were, and 'wait for each one of you to confess'" (Wynands 1999). He moves, thus, from his earlier poetic self -golden boy- into a more aggressive and direct role that denounces the evil part of humankind, in which he recognizes to be involved himself.

In the next poem of the collection, "The Hearth", the speaker keeps the same confident and assertive tone of "What I am doing Here"; however, Cohen introduces this time a modification in the speaker's confession with the element of self-mockery, so ultimately the poet turns into someone, if not humble, at least conscious of his commonness, "I also learnt my lust / was not so rare a masterpiece" (10). The poet admits, then, that he is not unique, he is just as plain and average as any other man "tripping over many pairs of legs" (10). By admitting his lack of importance by means of humour, the poet gets closer to humbleness, though he does not completely abandon his pose as 'front-line' writer, or in this case, of anti-poet.

In the same fashion, the poem "Destiny" revolves around the figure of the artist, it is a satirical piece of writing in which the speaker questions "the grandiose conception of his role as poet" (Scobie 1978: 49). He regrets that destiny ultimately finds him in bad shape,

> Destiny! Why do you find me in this bathtub,
> idle, alone, unwashed, without even
> the intention of washing except at the last moment? (226).

He enumerates as well different situations where he would have welcomed well destiny, for example:

> Why don't you find me at the top of a telephone pole,
> repairing the line from city to city?
> Why don't you find me riding a horse through Cuba,
> a giant of a man with a red machete?
> Why don't you find me explaining machines,
> to underprivileged pupils, negroid Spaniards,
> happy it is not a course in creative writing? (226).

Nevertheless, at the end of the poem he chooses his lover instead of destiny, "Destiny has fled and I settle for you" (226). It is a mild poem in comparison with the rest of the collection, it explores the notion of the anti-poet but with an open sense of self-parody, where there is no place for a pose of haughtiness, as it occurs in the aforementioned poems of the collection.

The anti-poet speaks again in the poem "Style", where Cohen directly deals with what Scobie believes to be the whole stance of the book, which is as aforementioned, "directed against writing formally 'good' poems" (1978: 45). The speaker defends in "Style" the new acquired notion of how a poem should be written, i.e., with no style at all. However, Cohen fails in this task by ironically writing a good poem, so at the end "the paradoxes of Cohen's

position overwhelm him. He insists that he 'will have no style' in a poem which very clearly does have a style" (Scobie 1978: 45). Furthermore, he inevitably acquires a style when announcing his plans: "I will forget my style / I will have no style" (48); in Wynands' words, "he announces -- a statement that, as soon as it is elevated to a stance, becomes in itself a style, of course" (1999). "Style", thus, has a style.

The poem is possibly the central piece of *Flower for Hitler,* since it directly impacts on Cohen's new pose towards poetry; it is not only thematically significant but formally too -there is no carelessness in displaying the verses, no strophes, no punctuation, language is vulgar, and the style is prosaic and deliberately ugly-. The speaker starts showing nonconformity with the radios of Russia and America, he probably despises the politic propaganda of Stalinism and McCarthyism that media had launched in order to control people's minds. However, he enjoys at the same time the music and the announcers of the radios:

> I don't believe the radio stations
> of Russia and America
> but I like the music and I like
> the solemn European voices announcing jazz (48).

The poet continues his reflections providing a geographical setting:

> I don't believe love
> in the midst of my slavery I
> do not believe
> I am a man sitting in a house
> on a treeless Argolic island (48).

He is writing his verses from the diaspora of a Greek island, but he does not believe actually to be in Europe since his mind is still in North America,

where he intends to free himself from all the influences that had shaped and determined his style:

> I will forget the grass of my mother's lawn
> I know I will
> I will forget the old telephone number
> Fitzroy seven eight two oh
> I will forget my style
> I will have no style (48).

Whether the speaker feels nostalgic or not towards his past, he is determined to finish with it. It is at least curious to notice how Cohen "consistently inverts the Europe/North America split so that, from Greece, North America now seems old" (Burnham 1993: 71); thus, Europe is not longer the old continent, it is instead North America where history lives. Nevertheless, the speaker begins to forget when the world begins to disappear, so "the erosion of his memory (…) mimics the sound of 'a thousand miles of hungry static / and the old clear water eating rocks'" (Deshaye 2009: 94); whereas the sky becomes at the same time a bloody spectacle that disturbs its blackness,

> Now a rooster with a razor
> plants the haemophilia gash across
> the soft black sky (49-50).

It is, then, with the destruction of the world that the speaker believes that he will finally succeed in forgetting, as Deshaye wrote, "Nuclear holocaust, operating metonymically through radio, functions as the technology of forgetting" (2009: 94). Thus, it is the radio the artifact that announces the end of every style, i.e., the end of language and cultures by means of war:

> The early morning greedy radio eats
> the governments one by one the languages
> the poppy fields on by one
> Beyond the numbered band
> a silence develops for every style (50).

The last verses of “Style” confirm the end of every style with “an external silence like the space / between insects in a swarm” (50). Silence reigns, thus, in space, whereas the style that the poet has “laboured” becomes a sort of electric weapon against humankind, “electric, unremembering / and it is aimed at us” (50). The last two verses close the poem with a menace; this sense of fear is stylishly represented by the use of parenthesis and the absence of punctuation at the end: “(I am sleepy and frightened) / it makes toward me brothers” (50).

There is not a consensual opinion about what “Style” means, but critics like Abraham have attempted to give a thematically consistent interpretation of the poem in which political reality coexists with Cohen's new stance on poetry. According to Abraham (1996), Cohen discusses in “Style” how his influences threaten his original thought, so he claims for the destruction of style. However, the poet ultimately realizes how style is a necessary component of understanding, in Abraham's words, “Communication requires a shared structure, a "style" that holds some relation to the world to which it speaks” (1996), so the poem is not only a rejection of style but a “satiric acknowledgement of its necessity” (1996). Therefore, the poet finds himself trapped in an unresolvable paradox: on one side originality demands the end of style, whereas on the other side the poet needs style in order to be understood by his readers. For Abraham, the poet reaches the following conclusion at the end of “Style”: “He must be derivative in order to be original” (1996), so he ultimately adopts the pose of the anti-poet. Just as it happens in “Lines from my Grandfather's Journal” in Cohen's former volume of poetry, both style and tradition are necessary requisites to write a poem.

This pose of the anti-poet is evident in poems like "Montreal 1964", where he "consciously turns against conventional 'poetic' gestures" (Scobie 1978: 47). The speaker begins describing life in a large city, presumably Montreal in 1964, where there are endless problems such as traffic, noise, pollution, violence, etc. He intermingles the harsh reality of the city with the imagery of a sexual encounter:

> Can someone turn off the noise?
> Pearls rising on the breath of her breasts
> grind like sharpening stones
> my fingernails wail as they grow their fraction
> I think they want to be claws
> the bed fumes like a quicksand hole
> we won't climb on it for love
> the street yearns for action nobler than traffic (70).

The tone of the poem changes in the second strophe with what Scobie describes as "literary allusion" (1078: 47); in fact, these verses are written in italics to probably highlight the change of tone into a crafted poetic exercise: "*Canada is a dying animal / I will not be fastened to a dying animal*" (70). However, in the next two verses, italics suddenly disappear and the speaker states the obvious, "That's the sort of thing to say, that's good, / that will change my life" (70). The prosaic style returns immediately to "Montreal 1964" and destroys any attempt of metaphor or complex imagery, so the speaker finds his voice again in the mockery and vulgarity that surrounds the rest of the poem. Other poems like "The Music Crept By Us" start with a promising title that alludes to Shakespeare's work *The Tempest* (1611); however, the piece ultimately turns into a demolishing picture of ugliness and disgust, as Ondaatje wrote, Cohen is "the mad revolutionary, vulgar (…) and loud in his attempts at muckraking" (1970: 39). Nonetheless, Cohen also knows how to make a fine use of satire without being loud and making a pose; this is the case of "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts

Homeward", where the poet describes himself as the sole tourist in Havana.

Cohen actually visited Cuba in 1961, when the relationships between America and Cuba were tense due to Castro's uprising; it was precisely Cohen's attraction for war, Utopia and socialism that made him leave Montreal in order to spend some time in Havana. Furthermore, Cohen's favourite poet Federico García Lorca had lived in Cuba and praised its "virtues and vices" (Simmons 2012: 92). From the island, the speaker of the poem dates his verses in April 1961, he makes "a retrospective examination of Canada's multiple problems and a resulting poetic list of suggestions, many facetious, to solve these problems" (Roy 1970: 88). Therefore, the poet turns his thoughts again to North America, where he examines the current state of affairs and calls his "brothers" to engage into action:

> let us threaten to join the U.S.A.
> and pull out at the last moment,
> my brothers, come,
> our serious heads are waiting for us somewhere" (82).

Cohen sustains this energetic tone throughout the poem, however, the piece is ultimately satirical and very humorous due to the actions that the speaker proposes to carry on, some of them impossible and others decidedly absurd:

> let us smelt pig-iron in our backyards,
> let us sell snow
> to underdeveloped nations,
> (Is it true one of our national leaders
> was a Roman Catholic?) (80).

Therefore, as Scobie suggested, "images strike an acute balance between what is totally absurd and what is just barely possible" (1978: 48). This

balance come from Cohen's use of rhetorical wit, very effectively -as Ondaatje pointed out- in public readings; on one hand, the poet transcends his pose and personal obsessions in order to critically consider the state of his country, but on the other hand, this critique is not so harsh since the poem is gentle and genuinely funny. Then, "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward" is not so much a reflection of the evil of humankind, it appeals instead, as Ondaatje wrote, "to a perverse love of anarchy in all of us" (1970: 36). Another satirical poem based on Canada's politics is "Business as Usual", a direct attack on Canadian politicians that invites readers by means of humour -as in "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward"- to adopt an anarchic attitude. The poem confronts the vulgarity of the social world in which Canadian politics are at the core of meagerness; it begins with what the speaker presumes to be a regular day in the Parliament:

> The gold roof of Parliament covered
> with fingerprints and scratches.
> And here are the elected, hunchbacked
> from climbing on each other's heads (22).

Cohen adopts, thus, a comic mood to describe "the favourite villains of all Canadians" (Scobie 1978: 36), whom are none others than the members of the parliament, a selected class who does not work for Canada but for themselves, "The most precious secret has been leaked / There is no Opposition!" (22). These politicians, "Over-zealous hacks hoist the P.M. / through the ceiling (...)" (22), entertain themselves by fooling "an entire sled-load of Miss Canada losers / by acting like a gargoyle" (22). However, social problems interfere with their businesses,

> Some fool (how did he get in) who
> wants jobs for everyone and says

so in French is quickly interred
under a choice piece of the cornice" (22).

But politicians ignore these claims and laugh while they ask for a movie, "(...) (STAG PARTY LAUGHTER) / When are they going to show the dirty movie?" (22). The poem ends with a humorous note addressed to "Miss Canada"; nevertheless, the satirical reality that Cohen depicts is not so far away from reality, so the poem -apparently mild and humorist- turns out to be serious and announces a world of social conflict and despair.

3.3. Evil is All Around

Cohen does not only employ wit and satire to criticize the social world that surrounds him, he insists instead in darker aspects of the human soul that contemplate terrible expressions such as torture, violence, pain, suffering, etc. This is the case of "A Migrating Dialogue", a satirical poem that uses Nazi imagery as a means to reflect on the horrors of humankind. Despite the seriousness of the topic, the poem still preserves a comic tone that according to Djawa attempts "to exorcise evil by filtering it through the comic mode" (as cited in Scobie 1978: 49). The poem starts with the caricature of a Nazi soldier, "He was wearing a black moustache and leather hair" (Cohen 2011: 182), that inevitably reminds the reader of Hitler, whose moustache was his most prominent physical feature. This character travels with a companion, both seem once war is over to "flee prosecution by the allied forces" (Wynands 1999); they "talked about the gypsies", so they have presumably not renounce to the ideology that condemns ethnic minorities. In the next stanza, the parody of the Nazi soldier is reinforced, he appears to be indeed an old man incapable of concealing his mindset with the after-war reality. His companion gives him advices in order to go unnoticed:

Don't bite your nails, I told him.
Don't eat carpets.

Be careful of the rabbits.
Be cute.
Don't stay up all night watching
parades on the Very Very Very late Show.
Don't ka-ka in your uniform (182).

Wynand compares the caricature of this Nazi soldier with Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), a mad Nazi scientist who sees in nuclear war an opportunity to increase his capacity of control. In this regard, both characters become ridicule and incapable of accepting reality, they are ultimately "transformed into a pathetic figure who lapses at times of uncontrollable psychological stress into old, deeply ingrained habits, which society does not sanction any longer" (Wynands 1999). At this point, the poem becomes diffuse, it does not follow any more a lineal narrative but introduces instead new voices that charge all kind of contemporary Western figures for the collaboration in Nazi crimes:

Wipe that smirk off your face.
Captain Marvel signed the whip contract.
Joe Palooka manufactured whips.
Li'l Abner packed the whips in cases.
The Katzenjammer Kids thought up experiments.
Mere cogs (182).

With these lines, Cohen implicates the whole Western culture in the Nazi atrocities, while he rejects at the same time the idea of Nazism as an exclusive German phenomenon, in Wynand's words:

no peculiarly German form of authoritarianism or mentality produced the Holocaust but rather Western culture as a whole, including exponents of ostensibly 'innocent' popular culture such as children's comics. No culture

> structured along its principles can claim immunity" (….). Therefore, even the comic-book hero Capitan Marvel is responsible for these crimes, so just as Horkheimer and Adorno claimed, both mass culture and Nazism are identical in their ideological implication (1999).

Then, all Western civilization and not only Germans are ultimately implicated: "I said WIPE THAT SMIRK including / the mouth-foam of superior disgust" (184). However, Cohen's approach to this idea by means of satire is debatable; instead of writing a poem describing the hardships and horrors that the Holocaust victims had to confront, he opts instead for a "slap in the face of bourgeois morality" (Wynands 1999); he reverses conventional aesthetics and creates provocative images that challenge the borders of what is morally acceptable, so many of his statements seem clearly addressed to attack the reader's sensibility: "Peekaboo Miss Human Soap. / It never happened." (184). These images press frequently into the surreal, so they can appeal to the most sordid, grotesque and tasteless aspects of the Holocaust. But the poet not only enumerates the horrors of the Nazi regime, such a the mountains of golden teeth extracted from Jews before their extermination -"I believe in gold teeth"-; he includes as well other historical events such as the destruction of Hiroshima, the fire on German cities like Dresden, etc.:

> The Treaty of Westphalia has faded like a lipstick
> smudge on the Blarney Stone.
> Napoleon was a sexy brute.
> Hiroshima was Made in Japan out of paper (184).

It seems, then, that the speaker is decided to apportion responsibility among all Western civilization, though he transmits flippancy when comparing events of different nature and proportion. He ultimately concludes this strophe with a rejection of history that reminds of F's attack in

> I think we should let sleeping ashes lie
> I believe with a perfect faith in all the history
> I remember, but it's getting harder and harder
> to remember much history (184).

The poem continues with the image of the trains in World War One that in the midst of celebrations sent soldiers to the front:

> There is sad confetti sprinkling
> from the windows of departing trains.
> I let them go. I cannot remember them.
> They hoot mournfully out of my daily life.
> I forget the big numbers,
> I forget what they mean (186).

The confetti and the atmosphere of celebration contrasts with the uncertain destiny of the young soldiers who might die in the war front; furthermore, the speaker links these trains with the boxcars that transport Jews to the camps, so the image of death is reinforced by "the organized mass murder of the third Reich" (Wynands 1999). These connections along the poem not only distributed guilt among all humankind, they enhance instead the reader's imagination to freely approach these historical events with different associations that lead the reader to the evil part of human nature. In front of this evil, the speaker wonders how the world confronts atrocity:

> I don't like the way you go to work every morning
> How come the buses still run?

How come they're still making movies? (184).

For the poet, thus, there is no possible sense of normality after a tragedy of the magnitude of the Holocaust, everything that surrounds him lacks importance, so the multiple voices of the poem turn at the end into a single voice that in the same fashion of Adorno's concern about writing poetry after Auschwitz insists on the importance of not forgetting the horrors of the camp. In Wynand's words:

> In an almost cathartic fashion, Cohen piles one (implied) atrocity on top of the next, always with a lighthearted flippancy and without going into detail, but in the multiplicity of voices suddenly a single voice emerges that goes beyond the dominant flippancy and articulates concerns similar to Adorno's (1999).

The poem, thus, could be interpreted as a way to come to terms with the horror by means of humour, it attempts to incorporate tragedy into everyday reality by treating it with flippancy; however, the poet fails in the attempt, so at the end prevails the impossibility of reconciling both horror and normality. The structure of the poem echoes as well the difficulty of finding a balance: the poem is diffuse, it rambles indeed from one idea to another, and some of its parts seem to not fit in the overall context. This is the case of the last stanzas, where the speaker starts apologizing in "the most elaborate style of his satirical public rhetoric" (Scobie 1978: 50): "I apologize in advance to all the folks / in this fine wide audience for my tasteless closing remarks" (186), to end describing a sexual scene between Hitler and his lovers Eva Braun and Geli Raubal:

Braun, Raubal and him
(I have some experience in these matters)
these three humans,

I can't get their nude and loving bodies out of my mind (186).

The image is at least striking, since it describes Hitler's body as "nude" and "loving", as Scobie wrote, "The association of Hitler with something as sensuous, vulnerable, beautiful, or just plain human as 'nude and loving bodies' is deeply disturbing, and inexplicable in its power" (1978: 50). The poem ends, then, in an ambiguous fashion with this strange image that has the power to some extent to erase the speaker's former discourse, so the reader finds himself trapped into the horror of normality, in which even villains like Hitler have lovers; then, the dictator is not only the Nazi monster but the ordinary man.

"A Migrating Dialogue" is one of the few poems of the collection that directly deals with the figure of Hitler. Due to the gravity of the historical events for which the dictator was responsible, it is not surprising to associate his figure with the most terrible and cold human nature. Nonetheless, Hitler's representations in popular culture often focus on humorist aspects rather than cruelty, this is the case, for example, of *The Great Dictator* (1940) by Charles Chaplin, in which Hitler is a narcissist and egocentric man that behaves like a spoiled child, or the most recent *Inglorious Bastards* (2009) from Tarantino that shows a hysterical and fanatic man. Humour has become, then, probably the resource to approach the representation of such a dark figure. In the same fashion, Cohen recurs to surrealism and grotesque images to approach Hitler's figure. As Scobie wrote, "the image of Hitler is absorbed into the overall surrealist tone of the book" (1978: 51). Cohen adopts, then, surrealism in order to confront the figure of Hitler.

There are three poems in the collection that carry the name of the dictator, among them "Hitler the Brain-Mole", a tale in the form of poem that accounts in a surrealistic way the transformation of the poet into a machine designed to serve the Nazi regime. In this sense, Nazis torture and take control over the different parts of the protagonist's body, so the speaker acquires Hitler's brain, "Hitler the brain-mole looks out of my eyes" (94), Goering's industrial control, "Goering boils ingots of gold in my bowels" (94), and Goebbels' propagandistic rhetoric, "My Adam's Apple bulges with

the whole head of Goebbels" (94). However, the poet is concerned with his Jewish identity, "No use to tell a man he's a Jew" (94), so this new man becomes a Nazi and a Jew; he is both a villain and a victim of the system. Therefore, Cohen suggests again the idea of the universal guilt in which all humankind participates, so "each of us has tortured, lied, killed, conspired against love. We all carry our own private hitlers" (Ondaatje 1970: 37). Hitler seems to be, then, all around.

The same sense of culpability is found in "Hitler", where "The leaders vast design, the tilt of his chin / seem excessively familiar to minds at peace" (336), so the Nazi leader is as mediocre as the rest of humankind. Nevertheless, the tone of the poem is calmer, it is a sort of farewell in which the speaker temperately collects the atrocities of the Nazi regime. The poem appears in the last pages of the volume, then, the sense of parting is accentuated and the horrible events of the past "turn up as poppies / beside the tombs and libraries of the real world" (336); it seems that Nazi crimes never occurred but in the minds of the rest of humankind:

> Now let him go to sleep with history,
> the real skeleton stinking of gasoline,
> the mutt and jeff henchmen beside him
> let them sleep among our precious poppies (336).
>
> Cadres of SS waken in our minds
> where they began before we ransomed them
> to that actual empty realm we people
> with the shadows that disturb our inward peace (336).

The poem introduces, then, the emotion of mental terror for those whom like Cohen did not witness the horrors of the Holocaust. Despite the collection of atrocities narrated in the poem, the presence of drugs create the illusion of an Holocaust in the mind, "the opium-bearing poppies, among which the comic-book Nazi leaders may be left to the drugged sleep of history are *ours* (…) it is in *our* minds and fantasies that such images begin as

well as end" (1978: 53). In this regard, the third poem in the collection that deals with the figure of Hitler directly approaches this theme in "Opium and Hitler", a "sharp and dark poem" (Ondaatje 1970: 38) where the perception of history is blurred due to the use of drugs and sex:

> No! He fumbled
> for his history dose.
> The sun came loose,
> his woman close.
>
> Lost in a darkness
> their bodies would reach,
> the Leader started
> a racial speech (200).

Nevertheless, Cohen not always approaches the figures of Nazi leaders from the surrealist world of the mind; for example, in "All There is to Know about Adolf Eichmann", the poet adopts a more scientific approach. As an almost research report, the poem enumerates the physical characteristics of Adolf Eichmann, but all of them -eyes, hair, weight, height, etc.- are medium. He has no special feature or anomaly to match with his terrifying acts, so he has ten fingers and ten toes, and his intelligence is medium. Eichmann's mediocrity is stressed when the speaker finishes his report and asks the audience:

> What did you expect?
> Talons?
> Oversize incisors?
> Green saliva?
> Madness? (164).

All these rhetorical questions acknowledge the fact that Eichmann was an average man, at least physically, so as Wynands suggests, “Eichmann was singled out only by the opportunity of circumstance: he happened to be in a particular place at a particular time” (1999). Therefore, the fact that anyone could have committed Eichmann's hideous acts under the same circumstances inevitably strikes the reader, who left in incomprehensibility questions the notion of the 'universal guilt'. Furthermore, the poem is effective due to the language and style that Cohen uses, which is factual and anti-poetic, and probably stresses Eichmann's mediocrity. Then, the use of a prosaic style along with a sparse language that prioritizes facts makes of Eichmann's mediocrity the best expression of terror.

The tone of the poem “Goebbels Abandons his Novel and Joins the Party” contrasts with the former piece about Eichmann; Cohen returns to the use of surrealist images to depict Hitler's propagandistic inventor. The speaker initially describes him as a poet:

> His last love poem
> broke in the harbour
> where wearing blondes
> loaded scrap
> into rusted submarines (52).

But he ultimately turns into “a Doctor of Reason” capable of leading humankind to violence and destruction. As Greenstein notes, “the poem "breaks" in the harbour, but the verb also signifies a breaking away from truth — the man "broke" or bankrupt in values” (1989: 43). This bankrupt implies Goebbels' depart from his novel in order to join the party and become the fearful figure of power in which he turned to; this change is highlighted by the use of mechanics over humankind, “the pieces of iron / broke whatever thous” (52), as well as by the shifting of pronouns at the end of the poem, in which the speaker addresses his last remarks to the readers in a didactic tone:

Ah my darling pupils
do you think there exists a hand
so bestial in beauty so ruthless
that can switch off
his religious electric exlax light? (54).

The speaker concludes the poem with a rhetorical and ambiguous question, in which he probably confronts the beauty of nature with the manipulative nature of Goebbels' propaganda that full of violence and hate is capable of switching off the magnificence of poetry.

On the other hand, there are many poems in the collection that deal with the notion of terror but do not directly recur to the figure of Hitler and the rest of Nazi leaders, since evil is inside the domestic realm as well. In Scobie's words, "It does not belong *out there*: it is inside, domesticated, and the external images are only projections" (1978: 53). For example, in "The Invisible Trouble" a man speculates with the past in concentration camps, he wonders what would have been to be inside one of them, but he has not real wounds apart from the images of horror that he watches in movies. In this regard, the poem connects with the aforementioned piece "Hitler", but this time there is no history in the poem but in the mere imagination of the speaker:

Too fevered to insist:
"My world is terror,"
he covers his wrist
and numbers of the war.

His arm is unburned
his flesh whole:
the numbers he learned
from a movie reel (84).

He projects, then, these images into his real life, so he ends living in a world of terror: “My world is terror”. The same world of terror occurs in poems that deal with the domestic sphere, such as “Heirloom”, where the speaker describes pretty and mundane objects like a glass bell, an expensive clock, or a music box that hide behind a world of violence, “The torture scene developed under a glass bell / such as might protect an expensive clock” (136); Terror is, thus, not only in the camps but in the houses and the minds of those who inhabit them, such as in “The Failure of a Secular Life”, in which the relationship between wife and husband becomes a “real-life Dachau”:

> The pain-monger came home
> from a hard day's torture.
>
> He came home with his tongs.
> He put down his black bag.
>
> His wife hit him with an open nerve
> and a cry the trade never heard.
>
> He watched her real-life Dachau,
> knew his career was ruined.
>
> Was there anything else to do?
> He sold his bag and tongs,
>
> went to pieces. A man's got to be able
> to bring his wife something (126).

3.4. The Saints of Modernity

Despite Cohen's use of the Holocaust in *Flowers for Hitler,* there are many other poems in the collection that remind the reader of Cohen's old rhetoric of teacher and pupil, master and slave, and saint and discipline. Poems such as “My Mentors”, “My Teacher is Dying”, and “Old Dialogue” directly deal with these relationships of power; the latter contemplates indeed a training that reminds of F's lessons in *Beautiful Losers*:

> -Has this new life deepened your perceptions?
> -I suppose so.
> -Then you are being trained correctly.
> -For what?
> -If you knew we could not train you (286).

But the parallelisms with *Beautiful Losers* go further in other poems of the collection that approach the figure of the saint -or the 'beautiful loser'- that overcomes reality and all of its terrors in order to achieve the sainthood described in the poem of the collection “For Anyone Dressed in Marble”:

> I see an orphan, lawless and serene,
> standing in a corner of the sky,
> body something like bodies that have been,
> but not the scar of naming in his eye.
> Bred close to the ovens, he's burnt inside.
> Light, wind, cold, dark — they use him like a bride (202).

The saint is, then, an extraordinary character that lives outside the rules of society, such as the 'lawless orphan' from Cohen's poem does. In Pacey's words:

> The "saint" is a lawless orphan because he has detached himself from the claims of family and society ; he stands in a corner of the sky because he has transcended earthly values; he has a body because he is still human, but he has overcome the human fault of missing the particular in the general by the use of "coarse names"; aware of human violence as expressed in the gas ovens of Nazi Germany, he has been purged by his closeness to it and has become a kind of empty vessel into which the eternal powers may pour themselves (1967: 17).

Therefore, 'Beautiful losers' are those who have confronted violence and destruction with success; they live free from family and social bonds since they are "incorrigible betrayers of the self" (Cohen 2011: 316). These are the words that the speaker of the poem "Disguises" dedicates to all saints and beautiful losers, who do not conform to what society expects from them. The speaker of the poem finds comfort in them, he tries indeed to become one despite the fact that they are 'half-mad' and society rejects them:

> Your all my comfort
> as I turn to face the beehive
> as I disgrace my style
> as I coarsen my nature
> as I invent jokes
> as I pull up my garters
> as I accept responsibility
>
> You comfort me
> incorrigible betrayers of the self (…) (315-316)

These new saints that the speaker celebrates are "symbols of mad virtue" (Ondaatje 1970: 41) shut down in mental hospitals; on the contrary, mediocre individuals belong to different social classes from workers and

"contemptuous servants" to a disappearing aristocracy that the speaker evokes with both nostalgia and sense of humour:

> I loved the rich man: I hate to see
> his season ticket for the Opera
> fall into a pool for opera-lovers.
>
> I am sorry that the old worker must go
> who called me mister when I was twelve
> and sir when I was twenty (310).

The speaker applies his wit too to those McGill University students who turned into "one-farced patriots", as well as with the "dope fiends of North Eastern Lunch" who end writing for the "Psychedelic Review". These characters become objects of mockery too since they have neglected their origins in order to embrace the respectable roles that society reserves for them, so "Suddenly they are all making movies" (314) to fit in their roles. The poem might appear at the beginning satirical due to Cohen's use of humour and irony, however, it turns ultimately into a celebration of the 'beautiful loser' that finds its best ally in the world of pop-art. The world of pop-art is directly addressed in poems like "Order", in which the speaker enters into a movie house where he identifies himself with the losers:

> I was with the snake who made his nest
> in the voluptuous treasure, I dropped
> with the spider to threaten the trail-bruised
> white skin of the girl who was searching
> for her brother, I balanced on the limb
> with the leopard who had to be content
> with Negroes and double-crossers
> and never tasted but a slash of hero flesh (…)
> (…) I knew

a million ways the jungle might have been
meaner and smarter. As the red sun
came down on their embrace I shouted
from my velvet seat, Get them, get them,
to all the animals drugged with anarchy and happiness (222).

As Scobie wrote, the speaker not only exalts "the stereotype 'losers' of African safari-adventure movies [but] the very nature of bad movies" (1978: 56). In this regard, bad movies are devoid of artistic pretensions and desires of posterity, so its nature "defies all ideals of permanence and solidity" (Scobie 1978: 56). Furthermore, bad movies stand close to the 'beautiful loser' since they provide a fail 'order', as well as they suffer rejection from critics who do not value the immediate and ephemeral emotions to which they appeal.

Other 'beautiful losers' in *Flowers for Hitler* appear in "The Project", a poem set in Montreal that resembles a short story. The protagonist finds himself in a hospital, they extract him blood for medical tests, while he remembers former acts of destruction that excite him:

I always wanted to set fire to your houses. I've been in them.
Through the front doors and the back. I'd like to see them burn
slowly so I could visit many and peek in the falling windows.
I'd like to see what happens to those white carpets you pretended
to be so careless about. I'd like to see a white telephone melting (156).

He addresses his anger later against the factory where he works, as well as the hospital in which he is locked,

It seems to me they took too much blood. Probably selling it
on the side. The little man's white frock was smeared with
blood. Little men like that keep company with blood. See them

in abatoirs and assisting human experiments" (156).

However, all these negative feelings turn at the end into something positive, since at least the protagonist possess an imagination "preferable to the sterility of a society in which even the power of sex is reduced to the feeble gesture of self-exposure" (Scobie 1978: 56). Therefore, the protagonist is a new saint who challenges the social order filled with "white bottles standing in front of million doors" (160); he is the 'beautiful loser' that invites the reader to destroy in order to reach sainthood.

The concept of the 'beautiful loser' appears again in "The New Step", a poem that adopts the form of a theatre play. The author presents the four characters of this "Ballet-Drama in One act": Mary and Diane are two young girls who live together, but while Diane is "a natural beauty, tall, fresh and graceful, one of the blessed" (240), her roommate Mary is "very plain, plum, clumsy: ugly, if one is inclined to the word" (240). The cast is completed by Henry, Diane's boyfriend, who "has the proportions we associate with Greek statuary. Clean, tall, openly handsome, athletic" (240), and the Collector, "a woman over thirty, grotesquely obese, a great heap, deformed, barely mobile" (240). The author proceeds to describe the opening scene and gives detailed stage directions that immerse the reader into the form of the play, which allows to see "the characters from the outside due to the objective form of the stage play, rather than the subjective viewpoint of the poems" (Scobie 1978: 58)

From this new angle, the reader notices how Diane's conventional beauty reigns over Mary in the opening dialogue, where both youngsters converse lively about the power of being attractive; but the situation changes when Diane leaves the scene and the Collector enters into it -she is an obese woman rejected by the standard canon of beauty, but she is brave and proud of her appearance-, she teaches Mary a new dance step "to start over and forget about all the things you were never really good at" (266); Mary is frightened at the beginning, but she ends practising it as part of a project that turns the losers of society -the obese and plump- into beautiful. The Collector is confident about her plans of domination, she acts then as a "sort

of messiah for the spastic and obese losers of the world" (Ondaatje 1970: 42).

When the Collector leaves, Diane appears into scene after a night out with her boyfriend Harry, but this time things have changed: Mary is not the same girl who practised ballet steps in order to emulate her roommate, she is turning instead into a powerful woman that accepts her ugliness, so at the end she paradoxically turns into beautiful, just as the Collector "wins in the new hierarchy of beauty" (Ondaatje 1970: 43). On the other hand, Diane loses her lover Harry as well as her power over Mary; she turns then into the ultimate loser of the play. Therefore, Cohen changes convention with this play, he outlines a new concept of hero inspired in "innocent freaks, the perverts, the revolutionaries. He makes them heroes not because their brilliant bows, but because they have magnificent wounds" (Ondaatje 1970: 43)

One of these heroes is Queen Victoria, a historical character that Cohen turns into a modern saint in "Queen Victoria and Me". Despite the unpopularity of the historical figure of Queen Victoria, Cohen chooses her to show his compassion and respect. In fact, it is not surprising Cohen's choice due to the attraction he seems to feel towards neglected and marginal characters; in this regard, as Ondaatje wrote, she is "the most artistically ostracized woman in history" (1970: 39). Then, Queen Victoria becomes the perfect candidate for what Cohen believes to be a 'beautiful loser':

> Queen Victoria
> my father and all his tobacco loved you
> I love you too in all your forms
> the slim unlovely virgin anyone would lay
> the white figure floating among German beards
> the mean governess of the huge pink maps
> the solitary mourner of a prince (230).

The speaker of the poem links the modern world he inhabits with the one of Queen Victoria in the nineteenth century, he converses with her about his

love problems:

> Queen Victoria
> I'm not much nourished by modern love
> Will you come into my life
> with your sorrow and your black carriages
> and your perfect memory (232).

The poem gives as well details about life in the Victorian period, from the colonialist spirit of the British empire, “the mean governess of the huge pink maps”, the Victorian architecture of the period with “a glass roof in a train station” and a “cast-iron exhibition”, the fashion and sexual practices of the time, “will you spank her with a mechanical corset”, the scientific discoveries of the age, “who discolour test tubes in the halls of science”, to the symbols of the period, such as “every World's Fair” that echoes The Great Exhibition held in London in 1851. But despite the distance in time and space that separates the speaker from Queen Victoria, they both share an “incomparable sense of loss” for the social changes that radically transformed the periods in which they respectively lived; they are outsiders, 'beautiful losers' that “at the end they move off together into the sunset, knowing they are perverse, beautiful outsiders” (Ondaatje 1970: 40):

> Let us be two severe giants
> (not less lonely for our partnership)
> who discolour test tubes in the halls of science
> who turn up unwelcome at every World's Fair
> heavy with proverb and correction
> confusing the star-dazed tourists
> with our incomparable sense of loss (232).

Cohen takes sides, thus, with the outsiders; he has made two saints out of

perversity by means of his both witty and romantic verses, in Ondaatje's words, “Cohen deals with this sainthood of perversity in a witty way” (1970: 40). Indeed, other poems of *Flowers for Hitler* abandon Cohen's stance against style and embrace wit and romanticism to deal with the figure of the 'beautiful loser'. This is the case of “For my Old Layton”, where Cohen does not directly deal with the real life of the poet, but with the image of the marginal writer that Layton tends to project in his poetry; therefore, the position of outsider makes him another appropriate candidate for the path of sainthood. The poem begins with a Layton that leaves his pain behind, then:

> like a cat leaves shit
> under stones, and he crept out in day,
> clean, arrogant, swift, prepared
> to hunt or sleep or starve (76).

As Deshaye suggests, “Cohen fashions Layton into an alley cat” (2009: 92); the cat enters into a town where inhabitants “saluted him with garbage”, but he interprets this welcome of orange peels and cans “as praise for his muscular grace”. The cat becomes a nuisance for the town, since he throws “(...) his shadow in moon-full windows / as he spied on the peace of gentle folk.” (76). He disrupts the lives of the inhabitants, but he seems to have overcome any trace of envy, so like a 'beautiful loser' he “(...) with a happy / screech he bounced from monument to monument” (76). He is, thus, a pure creature that feels bounded to the rest of outcasts of society, who are presumably his audience, such as “the snoring mates, the old, the children of the town”.

However, the cat ultimately decides to leave the town “(...) tired / of human smell, (...)”, so like an hermit “he slept on stone cribs, (...)”; he decides to live close to the seashore where the “salt-bright atmosphere” transforms his hair into “building crystals”. This is a beautiful image to end the poem, but above all it symbolizes a process of transformation in which

the alley cat turns into a "crafty, daring, insolent outcast -an artist and philosopher who once 'envied' a live audience but now prefers the one found among the 'monuments' in the cemetery" (Deshaye 2009: 93). In this regard and according again to Deshaye's interpretation,

> Cohen imagines Layton as a salt monument in a dried-up sea, a poet who escaped society but whose pity or interest compelled him to look backwards and crystallize into the one thing that he never wanted to be: an immovable object, something fixed" (2009: 93).

To end with the series of poems about historical figures that turn into 'beautiful losers', "Alexander Trocchi, Public Junkie, Priez Pour Nous" is the vivid image of the saint who works

> Under hard lights
> with doctors' instruments (…)
> in the bathrooms of the city
> changing The Law (102).

Trocchi, a drug-addicted Scottish novelist that fled from American justice for giving drugs to a minor, was sheltered by Cohen in Montreal in 1961 before he returned back to Scotland by ship. Trocchi represents for Cohen in the poem the summit of what is most "pure" and "simple"; it is a character associated with religious imagery -in the title, for example, the speaker asks him to "Priez Pour Nous"- so this new saint insists like "any messiah in his attempt to cleanse the world" (Ondaatje 1970: 41):

> You try to shoot the big arms
> of the Lincoln Memorial; (…)
> you drop pamphlets from a stolen jet:

"The Truth about junk";
you pirate a national tv commercial
shove your face against
the window of the living-room
insist that healthy skin is grey (106).

In the saint's attempt for renovation, the speaker of the poem is willing to follow him:

Your purity drives me to work
I must get back to lust and microscopes,
experiments in enbalming,
resume the census of my family address book (107-108).

The relationship between Trocchi and the speaker resembles to the pattern of saint and discipline that Cohen adopts in some of his poems, as well as in his second novel *Beautiful Losers*. In this sense, for Ondaatje, the poem actually "comes very close in form to *Beautiful Losers*" (Ondaatje 1970: 41) in the use of the discipline figure that "sounds like his novel's narrator -awkward, uncertain, and more conservative than the saint he admires" (Ondaatje 1970: 41):

I tend to get distracted
by hydrogen bombs,
by Uncle's disapproval
of my treachery
to the men's clothing industry.
I find myself
believing public clocks,
taking advice

from the Dachau generation (104).

The speaker acknowledges his mediocrity, so he asks Trocchi for guidance in the process of becoming a saint; the prayers of the saint become the speaker's hope for not turning into one of those poets who "(...) work bankers' hours / retire to wives and fame-reports" (102), then, Trocchi emerges as the role-model to follow in a world that, as Ondaatje suggests, it "is hardly romantic, but Cohen makes it all lyrical" (1970: 41). This world is the one of drugs, sexual experimentation, rebellion, marginal art, etc.; but it is at the same time the world that the speaker longs for, since it makes the individual pure and simple, far away from "bankers' hours". Cohen chooses the side of Trocchi, in Deshaye's words,

> the side of being in trouble (and in public). His appreciation for the "Junkie" is not simply for the abuser of drugs but also for the "Public" status of that abuse; it becomes an act of rebellion against a culture of strictly scheduled "bankers' hours" (2009: 92).

At the end, the speaker creates a myth, a real saint out of the figure of Trocchi: "You leave behind you a fanatic / to answer RCMP questions" (108). All these poems about historical characters share a highly romantic language and style that remind of Cohen's earlier poems, so *Flowers for Hitler* not only represents a break-down with style, it is instead a rich and interesting volume where different versions of Cohen emerge. In this sense, there are poems opposed to the world of evil that Cohen prioritizes in *Flowers for Hitler*, so pieces like "Nothing I Can Lose", "For E.J.P", and "Another Night with Telescope" induce the reader to a celebration of the beauty of poetry. For example, the speaker of "Nothing I Can Lose" faces the death of his father armed with "the wind, the pole will tell me what / and the friendly blinding light" (28); in "For E.J.P", the poet celebrates the beauty of words by recreating the Chinese atmosphere of Pound's translations,

Brown petals wind like fire around my poems
I aimed them at the stars but
like rainbows they were bent
before they sawed the world in half (174).

On the other hand, in "Another Night with Telescope", the poem that closes the collection, the speaker's initial disdain turns at the end into a pure admiration of nature:

I know the stars
are wild as dust
and wait for no man's discipline
but as they wheel
from sky to sky they rake
our lives with pins of light (63).

As Ondaatje wrote, "Cohen is still the great romantic" (1970: 44) in *Flowers for Hitler*, so despite the author's efforts to escape from the world of 'the golden-boy poet' in order to become the voice of his generation, the Canadian poet continues to go back to his older themes and obsessions, just as he does in his following works.

3.5. *Flowers for Hitler*: A Recapitulation

In *Flowers for Hitler*, Cohen ends with the outstanding lyricism and traditional style of his former poetry books and moves towards a contemporary verse that allows him to explore new themes and paths. Cohen's change of style caused different reactions among critics, who praised and criticized the volume in equal parts; nevertheless, the Canadian

artist managed to win with these poems the Québec Literary Award in 1964 and he started an intense promotional tour that firmly established his status as public persona.

Cohen's new poems break with the traditional form of the English poetry of the nineteenth century; he adopts instead a free verse, a deliberately ugly and prosaic language, as well as he mixes genres such as prose and drama. In this regard, the book is not a collection of beautiful poetry but a stance of a poet who does not believe in poetry anymore, i.e., it is the stance of the anti-poet that he timidly announced in his former collection *The Spice-Box of Earth.* Furthermore, Cohen adds new themes to his world of master and slaves in order to explore some of the social realities of the twentieth-century, such as the Cold War, Canada, and mainly Nazism and the Holocaust. In this regard, the artist does not deal with these events from a historical but personal perspective, then Cohen's treatment of tragic events such as the Holocaust caused a division of opinions among critics -for example, Sandra Djawa viewed Cohen's work as sensationalist, whereas others like Sandra Wynands understood the poet's use of the Holocaust as a means to shock audiences and trigger questions-. Furthermore, the poems of the collection explore the question on whether the Holocaust was an isolated event in history, or on the contrary it could be repeated again under different circumstances. Cohen firmly responds that the Holocaust is not a special form of evil, but another manifestation of human hatred from which everyone is responsible. In this regard, he uses the words of the writer and camp-survivor Primo Levi as the epigraph of the volume:

> If from the inside of the lager, a message
> could have seeped out to free men, it would
> have been this: Take care not to suffer in
> your own homes what is inflected on us here (as cited in Ondaatje 1970: 38).

Evil is, then, everywhere and not only in the concentration camps. In order to express this concern, Cohen opts for the anti-style that challenges

the reader's moral categories of what is acceptable. The poet adopts experimental techniques, surrealism and symbolism, as well as he adds in the poems dates, footnotes, lists, diary-entries, etc. In this sense, *Flowers for Hitler* already foreshadows the style of the Canadian artist's second novel *Beautiful Losers* -the most celebrated of Cohen's work and the piece in which he fully develops his themes and style-. Therefore, *Flowers for Hitler* becomes a fundamental work in the writing of *Beautiful Losers;* furthermore, some of the 'saints' that appear in Cohen's poetry, such as Alexander Trocchi, Queen Victoria, and Irving Layton become the kernel for Cohen's protagonists in *Beautiful Losers.* Thus, with *Flowers for Hitler*, Cohen decided to abandon his inner old world in order to make a step forward and become the prophet -the outsider- of his community that explores new territories such as the world of evil and the path towards sainthood.

Cohen breaks with his former style in the opening poem of the collection -"What I am Doing Here"- where the Canadian artist uses a prosaic language and flees away from poetic ornament. The poem stands as a confession of the speaker's guilt in the construction of a cruel society; however, the speaker is not the sole responsible and he ultimately emerges from a position of moral superiority. He is, indeed, the leader that refuses to take shelter in "the universal alibi". Therefore, what at the beginning seems to be a confession ends as the stance of a front-line writer who invites his audience to 'confess'. The speaker adopts the same attitude in "The Hearth", but this time Cohen introduces self-mockery, "I also learnt my lust / was not so rare a masterpiece" (2011: 10), so the tone is not as confident as in "What I am Doing Here". In this sense, other poems like "Destiny" relativize the poet's profession and display an open sense of self-parody where there is no place for the front-line writer.

The poem "Style" -the central piece of *Flowers for Hitler*- deals with Cohen's new attitude towards poetry. The poem adopts a total lack of carelessness in the form -no strophes, no punctuation, etc.-; however, it is still a good poem with style that paradoxically proclaims the destruction of style. The anti-poetic attitude reigns in poems like "Montreal 1964" and "The Music Crept by Us", where any attempt of beauty is run over by the vulgarity of the verses. However, the collection also offers poems that do not

directly reflect on style but in the social reality, such as the witty and ironic "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward", where the poet makes a retrospection of Canada's problems from the convulsive island of Cuba; he proposes, indeed, a battery of humorous and mostly impossible actions to solve the problems. Another satirical poem is "Business as Usual", where the poet strongly criticizes Canadian politicians, who are "The favourite villains of all Canadians" (Scobie 1978: 36).

As aforementioned, there are poems in the collection that explore terrible and dark aspects of the human soul, such as "A Migrating Dialogue", a piece that implicates the whole Western culture in the Nazi atrocities. Cohen uses Nazi imagery and provocative images that challenge conventional aesthetics; by means of surrealism, he includes different events in history such as Hiroshima, the First World War, the fire on German cities like Dresden, etc. The speaker rambles from one event to another until the end of the poem where the reader is confronted with a disturbing image of Hitler, Eva Braun, and Geli Raubal making love.

The image of Hitler adopts in the volume a surreal tone; he is the protagonist of poems like "Hitler the Brain-Mole", "Hitler", and "Opium and Hitler", where fantasy and historical scenarios coexist. On the other hand, there are poems like "The Invisible Trouble" and "Heirloom" that transfer the concentration camp into the domestic and psychological realm. Then, terror and hatred play an important role not only in Nazism but in everyday reality. However, the Nazi imagery prevails in the volume with poems like "All There is to know about Adolf Eichmann" and "Goebbels Abandons his Novel and Joins the Party", which introduce two important figures of Nazism as average men instead of villains. Therefore, the speaker highlights again the idea that evil is not something exclusive of a reduced group of men, so Goebbels and Eichmann become common men in a world of terror.

Despite the new world of terror that Cohen explores in *Flowers for Hitler*, there are still poems in the collection that approach relationships of power and resume the rhetoric of the teacher and pupil present in *The Spice-Box of Earth;* some examples are "My Mentors", "My Teacher is Dying", and "Old Dialogues", in which Cohen describes training processes that remind the

reader of F's lessons in *Beautiful Losers* to become a saint. Furthermore, the collection includes poems that directly reflect on the figure of the saint who overcomes the terrors of reality in order to achieve sainthood, such as in "For Anyone Dressed in Marble". *Flowers for Hitler* dedicates poems, thus, to a group of 'Beautiful Losers' who do not fit in society and take refuge in the world of pop -such as it happens in "Order"-, or in a new dance step – as in "The New Step"- that shows outcasts how to transcend reality. Furthermore, historical characters like Queen Victoria, Irving Layton, and Alexander Trocchi become the 'new saints' of modernity.

The collection closes with a group of highly romantic poems that echo Cohen's first work *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and flee away from the world of evil that prevails in the volume. Thus, "Nothing I can Lose", "For E.J.P", and "Another Night with Telescope" return to Cohen the crown of 'the golden-boy poet' in Canadian letters.

CHAPTER IV:

Beautiful Losers: A Canadian Postmodernist Novel in the Realms of Desire.

The following chapter features Cohen's second novel *Beautiful Losers* (1966) as an example of Canadian Postmodernist fiction that explores questions of national identity and desire. The chapter is divided into four sections: 'Cultural Heritage Background', 'Canadian Postmodern', 'An Interpretation of Desire', and '*Beautiful Losers*: A Recapitulation'.

Section one approaches the novel through the cultural and historical factors of Canada. It introduces critical and theoretical concepts from Canadian authors like Margaret Atwood, Northrop Frye, or Hugh MacLennan; as well as gathers philosophical concepts from the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. The section offers a round through colonial Canada, dating back to the seventeenth century French invasions to contemporary Quebec, while it explores at the same time the national ethos and the conflicts derived from colonial practices.

Section two deals with the concept of the 'Canadian Postmodern' that the academic Linda Hutcheon extensively studied in her critical works. The section offers first an approximate definition of the postmodern based on Iain D. Thomson's book *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (2011). It applies then the premises of this cultural movement to the specificities of the Canadian context and the writing of *Beautiful Losers;* it explores new concepts such as 'Historiographic Metafiction', coined by Hutcheon, as well as postmodern techniques like intertextuality, irony and parody, narrative and language fragmentation, playfulness, etc.

Section three offers an interpretation of the literary discourses that Cohen presents in *Beautiful Losers*. All of these discourses depart from the exploration of desire in different realms: language, mythology, power relationships, history, etc. To support this analysis, a set of philosophical and theoretical concepts are provided, such as the 'Sacred-profane dichotomy' from Émile Durkheim, 'The Gutenberg Galaxy' and 'Global Village' from Marshall McLuhan, and the 'Desiring Machine' from the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Finally, section four summarizes and gathers the main ideas of the chapter.

4.1. Cultural Heritage Background

Beautiful Losers has often been referred by critics as an example of Canadian postmodernist literature; in fact it is considered to be one of the first experimental novels published in Canada in 1966. When Cohen wrote *Beautiful Losers,* the American modernist literature had already absorbed the narratives from Faulkner and Dos Passos. New paths towards experimentalism were opened and a challenging linguistic and sexual freedom let authors like W.S Burroughs, Pynchon, or Torcchi to present new ways of writing stories in the midst of the 1960's scene: drugs, counter-cultural movements, revolution, new sexual possibilities, etc. All of these issues are explored in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers,* but always with Canada at the front of the narrative.

Cohen's novel is unquestionable tied to Canada and its history. The text captures the essence of the Montreal of the sixties: revolts against the English in French Quebec, American and Hollywood cultural invasion, sexual mysticism, multiculturalism in the streets, the commercialization of religion with plastic figures of the Canadian saint Kateri Tekawitha, etc. But the novel goes beyond modern Canada, back to the encounter of the Jesuits with native Americans, going back and forth in time of Canadian history.

Both in modern and old Quebec, *Beautiful Losers* examines the pattern of victors and victims that Margaret Atwood described in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). According to the Ontario novelist,

Cohen's text is representative of the Canadian psyche that needs to identify itself with victims. Whereas Americans manifest in their literature a strong will to win, or at least the desire to reach the 'City Upon a Hill', Canadians seem to prefer failure: "Much Canadian writing suggests that failure is required because it is felt – consciously or unconsciously – to be the 'right' ending, the only thing that will support the characters' (or their authors') view of the universe" (Atwood 1972: 34). Therefore, Canadian literature holds a large record of texts with characters who struggle to survive in a hostile environment; in the past the obstacles for survival were exterior -wild and dangerous nature- but in modern Canada become interior -spiritual crisis, alienation, etc. Survival, *la Survivance,* becomes the central symbol for Canada.

This tendency to the negative is embodied in the protagonist of *Beautiful Losers,* an English-Canadian scholar who suffers from constipation and feels alienated from contemporary society, he is "a victim who needs to be a victim, and his interest in the A--- tribe is a symptom of this need" (Atwood 1972: 101). Therefore, the scholars passion for the A---'s, Catherine Tekawitha and the rest of "fictional victims" he collects from libraries (Cohen 2001: 7) is only a reflection of his necessity; victims are for him a mirror of his own self.

The narrator's relationships with the outside world are limited to his best friend and lover F., a *Quebecois* revolutionary who dies in an asylum for the criminal insane, and his wife Edith, a young woman who belongs to the A---'s, tribe of losers among the First Nations; she was raped at the age of thirteen by a group of Frenchmen and ends committing suicide squashed by an elevator. Therefore, not only the narrator but his companions are victims, just as Catherine Tekawitha -the seventeenth century Indian virgin with whom the narrator is obsessed and she converts to Catholicism- is a masochist that ends dying of her addiction to flagellation and self-mortification. The rest of the characters of the novel are in one way or another victims, for example, Mary Voolnd, the nurse that helps F. to escape from the mental institution is devoured by "salivating police dog jaws" (Cohen 2001: 226). And even Hitler is victimized when Edith affirms after the Argentinian orgy: "For a second I thought he was an A---" (383). Thus, *Beautiful Losers* becomes a universe of victims that represent the Canadian

idea of failure; characters struggle to survive and not always manage to do it.

The narrator and his two friends, all of them symbolic orphans, live isolated in modern Montreal and belong to some extent to the 'Garrison mentality' that Northrop Frye coined in his conclusion to Carl F. Klinck's *Literary History of Canada* (1965) as a recurrent theme in Canadian literature. The term, which inspired Atwood to write *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, is assumed to represent the Canadian ethos that fears the vastness of the landscape and the oppressiveness of nations like the United States. This fear is translated into literature with fictional characters who build imaginary walls against the outside world and opt to remain isolated in fortified garrisons of the mind. In this regard, 'I' -the narrator- lives confined in his basement apartment and fears the crowdedness of the streets of Montreal: "This is an awful crowd, F. Let's walk faster" (118). Locked in his books and his obsession towards the saint Kateri Tekawitha, the scholar questions the outside world, which he fears but longs for: "What's is like outside? Is there an outside? I am the sealed, dead, impervious museum of my appetite. This is the brutal solitude of constipation, this is the way the world is lost" (40). However, despite his desire, the narrator is paralysed and remains alone in his fortress surrounded by problems represented symbolically in the bad workings of his body.

The oppressive force responsible for 'I's' constipation is History. The title of 'Book One', "The History of them All", already announces the cause of the narrator's sickness. This section -which not only deals with the adventures of the three protagonists in modern Montreal but with the successive conquests and colonial forces in Canada- is written in the form of a journal. The reader knows the narrator's fears, pains and obsessions. Among his troubles, the constipation of his body impedes him to take rid of history and to become a saint. The 'shit' he retains in his body is associated with memory: "Constipation didn't let me forgive" (41). It is "a physical manifestation of the retention of the past" (Heidenreich, 1989: 89).

Therefore, history is viewed in *Beautiful Losers* as a burden and a system that needs to be destroyed; it is the oppressive force that deprives 'I' from living in eternity, then F. designs a training method to make the narrator

abandon all systems and embrace magic. F.'s lessons are, thus, an attempt to escape from the victim condition in which the narrator is trapped. However, it is only through History that the narrator can approach the figure of Catherine Tekawitha in *Beautiful Losers.* The scholar undertakes the task of writing the biography of the saint, so he needs to go back to historical sources in order to collect facts and details, but he keeps adding fantasy and fiction to his account. Actually, 'I' will only truly reach Catherine and get under her "rosy blanket" when he forgets about Historical Time and his memory becomes timelessness. It will be then when the narrator achieves sainthood and becomes free from the history that oppresses him.

Nonetheless, *Beautiful Losers* goes beyond the personal drama of three characters who lived confined in contemporary Canada and struggle to escape from their victim condition. In addition to the private story that features love, death and sexual experimentation; the novel simultaneously deals with a political discourse about Canada and its history. As Linda Hutcheon suggests, the protagonist trio "plays out the history and destiny of Canada, of her successive conquests (the deaths of the Indian, Edith, and the French, F.), and perhaps of her future fate (turning into an American movie)" (1980: 159). Therefore, the novel captures both First Nations and French invasions, but also deals with the fear of Canadians about contemporary American culture; Hollywood movies and pop culture invade the streets of Montreal and menace to end with spirituality and sweep away the Canadian tradition. As F. writes in his letter to the narrator:

> The English did to us what we did to the Indians, and the Americans did to the English what the English did to us. I demanded revenge for everyone. I saw cities burning, I saw movies falling into blackness. I saw the maize on fire. I saw the Jesuits punished. I saw the trees taking back the long-house roofs. I saw the shy deer murdering to get their dresses back. I saw the Indians punished. I saw chaos eat the gold roof of Parliament. I saw water dissolve the hoofs of drinking animals. I saw the bonfires covered with urine, and the gas station swallowed up entire, highway after highway falling into the wild swamps (187).

This claim for revenge illustrates the ambiguity of the Canadian mindset, where victims can turn into victimizers and oppress previous groups. Canada is, therefore, a land of colonizers and colonized; and the narrator of *Beautiful Losers* asks himself frequently with guilt about Canada and its history, "I've poisoned the air, I've lost my erection. Is it because I've stumbled on the truth about Canada? I don't want to stumble on the truth about Canada. Have the Jews paid for the destruction of Jericho? (…) I thought the Indians died of bullet wounds and broken treaties" (35). The private and public levels of discourse merged into I's consciousness and Canada becomes a source of pain for the scholar; the country and its history belong to his field of study: failure.

But going back to the times in which the saint Catherine Tekawitha lived, *Beautiful Losers* deals with colonial issues and describes the encounter between native Americans and French in the seventeenth century. Cohen gives an account of Catherine Tekawitha's conversion to Catholicism and supports his narration with parts of the Jesuit chronicles that proclaim the miracles of the *Vièrge Iroquois.* The Indian tribe of the Mohawk to which Tekawitha belongs is described as natural and magical, a recurrent stereotype for Indians in literature and artistic representations. In Catherine's tribe, community stands over the individual and natural laws exclude rationality.

With the arrival of French and their rationalistic and colonizing discourse, native Americans respond with the 'Telephone Dance', pulling their fingers into their ears and connecting with the "ordinary eternal machinery" that keeps them safe from the Jesuits. However, when they words are ignored, the religious Frenchmen opt to show them the picture of an old decrepit Iroquois woman in hell. This time the painting impacts the Mohawks and the Jesuits achieve their goal with conversions to the catholic faith: "That's right, pull them right out, the priest invited them. And don't put them back. You must never put them back again. Old as you are you must forget forever the Telephone Dance" (82). The tribe abandons the community and enters into the realm of individuality, then they "shiver with a new kind of loneliness" (82), and they feel separated from the nature to which they were

bonded before:

> They could not hear the raspberries breaking into domes, they could not smell the numberless pine needles combing out of the wind, they could not remember the last moment of a trout as it lived between a flat white pebble on the streaked bed of a stream and the fast shadow of a bear claw. Like children who listen in vain to the sea in plastic sea shells they sat bewildered. Like children at the end of a long bedtime story they were suddenly thirsty (82).

Despite the fact that Jesuits are the ones who bring thought to the tribe and trigger "a new kind of loneliness" that excludes magic from life, the religious Frenchmen are not condemned in the novel. In fact, they believe in magic too when they chose to prevail Tekawitha's miracles over historical facts. As 'I' writes in his journal: "I love the Jesuits because they saw miracles. Homage to the Jesuit who has done so much to conquer the frontier between the natural and the supernatural" (99). The catholic priests accept the possibility of magic and manage to break the rational system of the world by celebrating Catherine's miracles after her death. Not only Jesuits believe in magic but they are victims of love and desire as well, such as 'I' acknowledges in his research: "Il y a longtemps que je t'aime. (…) He speaks about a spring called *Tekawitha's Spring.* The priest is our Edouard Lecompte, and because of this half paragraph I know he loved the girl" (67). Furthermore, Jesuits are victims of native Americans and suffer appalling tortures to death; in the novel F. recites to Edith how the Iroquois killed without mercy the Jesuits Brébeuf and Lalement. Again, victims turn into oppressors and both Indians and French are victims and victimizers.

A victim from the Jesuits is Catherine Tekawitha, who in order to purge her sins and prove her love to God, she tortures herself with extreme corporal punishments that will put an end to her life. The Indian virgin, an orphan raised by her aunts and uncle, discovers at an early age her commitment to God and refuses to marry a Mohawk; Catherine Tekawitha's

destiny is much more special. As a teenager she feels the demands of the flesh and understands that she lives in a woman's body, though this body does not belong to her but to God: “She lived in a woman's body but -it did not belong to her! It was not hers to offer! (...) a new description of herself, so brutally earned, forced itself into her heart: She was a Virgin” (51). Catherine's virginity defies the rules of her community and infuriates her people, who do not doubt to insult and punish her. She becomes an outsider who rejects sex and denies “her membership in the newly-isolated domain of instinct” (Lee, 1977: 65). In this sense, Catherine represents the rebel who dismisses carnality and introduces a new kind of sensibility that along with the Jesuit discourse ends with the tribal group.

But Catherine converts to Catholicism and moves to a Christian community where she encounters some of her old difficulties. As a young woman she needs to get married:

> In the winter of 1678-1679 another marriage project developed. Everybody, included Anastasie, wanted Catherine Tekawitha to have her cunt opened. Here in this Christian village, or there among the heathens, it was all the same. Every community was, by its nature, ultimately secular (192).

Therefore, both the Christian and Indian communities try to impose their rules over the individual, but Catherine firmly rejects this marriage and manages to overcome the social pressure.

Nevertheless, the Iroquois virgin experiments the prejudices of Christians who do not “like her skin too much” (193), and refuse to baptize her because “Indians are fickle” (87). Indeed, despite Catherine's blind faith to God, the Mohawk virgin needs to promise in order to be baptized never to leave the Christian village. Catherine accepts and the Jesuits force her to break the promise she once did to her uncle about not leaving aside her roots and family. But Tekawitha is not only deprived from her Indian origins but from her identity, furthermore, the French change her former name Kateri Tekawitha into 'Catherine'; oral culture is then transformed into the writing

of the Jesuits. This action is far away from anecdotal and represents the colonization of France into native territory.

The process of naming is frequently discussed in *Beautiful Losers* and becomes one of the obsessions of the narrator, who keeps changing Tekawitha's name along the narrative and writes "the different spellings of Tekakwitha, Tegahouita, Tegahkouita, Tehgakwittt, Tekakouita" (41). For 'I', "The French gave the Iroquois their name. Naming food is one thing, naming a people is another, not that the people in question seem to care today" (6). In this regard, the scholar "associates naming with the colonial practice of domesticating the other" (*Historical Alterity,* Siemerling 1994: 420). In other words, to name is to control. This imperialistic practice is ironically represented in the nameless narrator of *Beautiful Losers,* who deprived from a name reacts against English by changing his words to the 'Iroquois', a native language which ended

> every speech with the word *hiro,* which means: like I said. Thus each man took full responsibility for intruding into the inarticulate murmur of the spheres (…) at the end of every utterance a man stepped back, so to speak, and attempted to interpret his words to the listener, attempted to subvert the beguiling intellect with his noise of true emotion (9).

In this regard, the Iroquois is presented as the ideal language that reunites communication with emotion, it is a language of cosmic dimensions that bestows responsibility both on the speaker and listener, and it is designed "to pierce the mysterious curtain which hangs between all talking men" (9). However, the narrator's attempt to speak 'Iroquois' is sabotaged by the direction of Canadian history and its colonizing experience. First, the orality of Indian culture and its legends is destroyed by the introduction of French writing, but later the English spread their language in Quebec in order to gain political and military power over the French. As Hutcheon suggested, "Individuals are seen to suffer the same fate as their people: Tegaignta becomes Marie-Thérèse, and the Indian Kateri turns into

Catherine, the virginal Christian saint" (1988: 39). Thus, "names are not just appearance, though; they are destiny" (Hutcheon 1988: 39). The act of naming becomes an act of power that affects the individual.

In *Beautiful Losers,* France is the first colonial force in Canada, a detailed account of the invasion is given by the narrator: "Canada became a royal colony of France in 1663. Here comes the troops by le marquis de Tracy, lieutenant-general of the armies of the king, here they come marching through the snow, twelve hundred tall men, the famous régiment de Carignan" (78). Along with the troops, Jesuits came to evangelize First nations; a cultural and religious transformation began and the territory named as New France became influenced by the customs and traditions of the French. However, British presence in French territories increased in the following century and New France became a part of the new-born province of Quebec. The French colonial empire collapsed and the English gained control over the province, starting then the sense of social alienation and cultural dispossession that persists today in modern Quebec.

In this evolution towards contemporary Quebec, the British became industrialized and gained the economical power, whereas the French remained farmers and devote their efforts to protect their language and faith. Two different societies emerged in the same territory but communication between them was nonexisting. This division was portrayed by the writer Hugh MacLennan with his novel *Two Solitudes* (1945), in which he describes the difficulties of reconciling both societies and of achieving a satisfactory Canadian identity. Furthermore, his term 'Two Solitudes' became popular in the Canadian mindset and it symbolizes the lack of communication, as well as the will of not reconciling differences between Anglophones and Francophones. It will not be until the 'Quiet Revolution' -or 'La Révolution tranquille'- in the 1960's that the economical power of the Anglo descended in benefit of a new industrialized Quebec with less influence of the catholic church but with a strong sense of identity in the French language and culture. *Beautiful Losers* -written around 1964- captures the vibe of the Montreal of the 1960's and portrays the affirmation of French culture along with the political tensions and violent outbursts between the two groups.

The modern plot of the novel takes place in Montreal, but in a neutral territory located in Boulevard Saint Laurent, or 'The Main', that divides the city into east and west and, thus, symbolically into French and English. The protagonists of the novel illustrate as well this duality: 'I' is the English speaking Canadian, whereas F represents the *Quebecois* politician who longs for an independent Quebec. It is through F. that *Beautiful Losers* introduces the political question:

> It is not merely because I am French that I long for an independent Québec. It is not merely because I do not want our people to become a quaint drawing on the corner of a tourist map that I long for thick national borders. It is not merely because without independence we will be nothing but a Louisiana of the north, a few good restaurants and a Latin Quarter the only relics of our blood. It is not merely because the lofty things like destiny and a rare spirit must be guaranteed by dusty things like flags, armies and passports (186).

F.'s nationalistic view is built over his commitment to revolution rather than to his French origin. F. believes in the rupture of the political Canadian system that creates victims and victimizers; he joins the Quebec revolution and dreams with a new Quebec where "They walk differently now, the young men and women of Montreal" (186). But it is significant, as Scobie points out that "the main visible difference in this vision of a future post-revolutionary Québec is sexual" (1978: 112). Then, in the new Montreal, "Good fucks (…) have migrated from marble English banks to revolutionary cafés. There is love on Rue Ste. Catherine, patroness of spinsters" (Cohen 2001: 186). Politics are hence used in the novel to explore sexuality, and political revolution turns into a means of conquering the realm of physical desire. However, this conquest is not possible as the episode of the separatist rally in the novel suggests.

In this passage, F. and the narrator while walking in the streets of Montreal found themselves accidentally involved in a demonstration against

the visit of Queen Elisabeth in 1964. 'I' wants to avoid the crowd and asks F. to walk faster, but the Quebecois replies: “No, it is a beautiful crowd (…) They are Negroes, and that is the best feeling a man can have in this century! (118). The use of the term 'Negroes' when referring to the French Canadian demonstrators establishes a comparison between the oppression of African Americans and the one suffered by French speakers in Quebec; while the comparison sounds misguided, it illustrates nonetheless the continuous account of victims oppressed by different types of systems: 'Negroes' are oppressed by white Americans, while Francophones in Quebec by English Canadians. In some way, F.'s answer introduces the idea of 'négritude' developed by francophone black intellectuals in the France of the 1930's, when they rejected the French hegemony and colonial racism in order to reclaim a common black identity.

The protagonists join the crowd and participate in their demands: “History! they shouted. Give us back our History! The English have stolen our History!” (118). The voice of a young film director resonates in the crowd: “History decrees that there are Losers and Winners. History cares nothing for cases, History cares only whose turn it is. I ask you, my friends, I ask you a simple question: whose Turn is it today?” (118). The narrator stimulated by the presence of a feminine hand in his trousers suddenly starts to shout slogans in favour of the separatists. However, the crowd begins to disperse and 'I' is immediately recognized as an English-speaking Jew. His sexual desire is not fulfilled and the scholar needs to be rescued by F. for his condition of English-speaking Jew. But at the same time, the demands of the crowd are silenced and the protesters are dispersed in order to restore public order in the streets of Montreal. Thus, the historical turn of the losers does not arrive and a sexual, political and historical frustration prevails in modern Canada.

Despite the fact that for F. prevails the sexual experience over the political one, he actively participates in the Quebec revolution by placing a bomb in the statue of Queen Victoria: “It is only the copper effigy of a dead queen (who knew, incidentally, the meaning of love), it is only a symbol, but the State deals in symbols. Tomorrow night I will blow that symbol to smithereens- and myself with it” (135). F. does not blow himself but loses

one finger in his terrorist action and he is sent to the mental institution where he ends dying, maybe of the wounds from the explosion or of the syphilis he apparently contracted before. But F.'s attack to the statue of Queen Victoria is not the only violent outburst in *Beautiful Losers,* for example, the young film director that leads the separatist rally shouts: "Today it is the Turn of the English to have dirty houses and French bombs in their mailboxes! (120).

This statement coincides with the tensions that the country lived since 1963 with the '*Front de Libération de Québec*', a paramilitary group that launched a decade-long series of propaganda and terrorism attacks that included bombings and robberies. Cohen captures the moment in Beautiful Losers and acknowledges to some extent with F. and the demonstrators' failures the uselessness of violent attacks which do not solve the problem of Canadian identity, since the roots of the matter seem much more deeper and do not end with political independence. A. Sutherland wrote, "A list of words can be formulated easily enough, no doubt, but to supply these wants will not solve the problem, which is primarily a community projection of the sense of frustration so effectively dramatized" (1971: 22).

Actually, F. ends recognizing in the letter he writes to the narrator his doubts about the Quebec revolution: "I will confess that I never saw the Québec Revolution clearly, even at the time of my parliamentary disgrace. I simply refused to support the War, not because I was French, or a pacifist (which of course I'm not), but because I was tired" (162). F.'s confession and his lack of commitment to the revolution lacks credibility to his previous actions, such as the blowing of the Queen's statue. F. recognizes: "I have nothing against the Queen of England. Even in my heart I never resented her for not being Jackie Kennedy. She is, to my mind, a very gallant lady, victimized by whoever it is who designs the tops of her uniforms" (185). Therefore, F. is an anarchist rather than a revolutionary, and his membership to the Parliament of Quebec is a means to achieve personal power rather than to fight for independence: "Yes, I long to be President of the new Republic. I love to hear the armed teenagers chant my name outside the hospital gates. Long live the Revolution! Let me be President for my last thirty days" (153).

But in F.'s path towards personal power and sexual fulfilment, the narrator's friend finds an impediment in the Church institution. In modern Quebec the influence of Catholicism is still significant since French Canadians have assimilated their faith as a symbol of identity that distinguishes them from the British. However, the church is at the same time according to 'I' responsible for "Montreal's architecture":

> I don't like what's happening to Montreal architecture. What happened to the tents? I would like to accuse the Church. I accuse the Roman Catholic Church of Québec of running my sex life and of shoving my member up a relic box meant for a finger, I accuse he R.C.C. Of Q. of making me commit queer horrible acts with F., another victim of the system, I accuse the Church of killing Indians, I accuse the Church of refusing to let Edith go down on me properly, I accuse the Church of covering Edith with red grease and of depriving Catherine Tekawitha of red grease, I accuse the Church of haunting automobiles and of causing pimples, I accuse the Church of building green masturbation toilets, I accuse the Church of squashing Mohawk dances and of not collecting folk songs, I accuse the Church of stealing my sun tan and of promoting dandruff, I accuse the Church of sending people with dirty toenails into streetcars where they work against Science, I accuse the Church of female circumcision in French Canada (47).

This long list of accusations for which 'I' blames the Church includes a diversity of social and personal crimes that deal mainly with the inability of the catholic institution to confront sexuality. The Church is responsible in *Beautiful Losers* for the construction of modern Montreal and the system of moral values that regulates society, conceals sexuality, and ignores the frustrations emerged in Quebec. Furthermore, as Scobie points out: "This puritanism in fact traps the Church into a kind of salaciousness" (1978: 103).

The reader gets to know how the Jesuits took pleasure in watching Tekawitha's self-mortification and flagellation, in fact, the priest who is in love with her is described as: "whetting our sexual appetite in his expert Company manner" (16). And the narrator also acknowledges the Church

sadism when writing about the tortures of the Jesuits: “It's all down there in black and white. The Church loves such details” (15). An extreme example in the novel of the Church's view over sexuality occurs in the episode of Edith's rape, from which 'I' accuses the catholic institution “of being one of the social forces implicitly approving of Edith's rape” (Scobie, 1978: 103). Edith belongs to the A--- tribe, she is an Indian women and her rape by Frenchmen is unconsciously supported by the community. Therefore, colonial practices oppress the other, but this time they take the shape of sexual abuse.

Another sever accusation occurs when 'I' affirms that the Church “killed Indians”. In the process of evangelization, the catholic institution destroyed First nations culture and beliefs, including the natural landscape and the magic attributed to tribal societies. Throughout the novel, 'I' denounces this abuse several times:

> French Canadian schoolbooks do not encourage respect for the Indians. Some part of the Catholic Canadian mind is not certain of the Church's victory over the Medicine Man. No wonder the forests of Québec are mutilated and sold to America. Magic trees sawed with a crucifix” (58).

Therefore, both nature and magic -two entities prominently present in First Nations' villages- become destructed by Catholic minds, which are the same minds that sell Canada's natural richness to Americans.

In regard to America, another level of colonialism is described in *Beautiful Losers* with the continuous presence of pop culture in the streets of Montreal. Canada's border with the US is culturally blurry, the English language and the proximity and migration between the two countries facilitates cultural exchange. But whereas Americans started to claim their national identity through the literature and art of the nineteenth century, Canada's diversity made it difficult for the country to establish a distinctive culture that brought together the First Nations, British, and French traditions. It is not until the twentieth century that Canadians start to acknowledge their national art and literature as truly unique and independent. In the same century, the United

States rises as the first economical and political force of the world and starts to spread its culture all over the world, specially in Canada due to its geographical proximity. This influence stands as another form of colonialism and Canadians fear the oppressiveness that their neighbours execute on their national ethos; the strong American identity menaces to sweep the not so prominent Canadian culture.

America's imaginary is deeply rooted in the Canadian landscape due to the Hollywood industry, so it is not surprising that 'I' weeps for "the American boyhood I never had, for my invisible New England parents, for a long green lawn and an iron deer, for college romance with Zelda" (62). Hollywood stars become the new saints of modern Canada, "Who will exhume Brigitte Bardot and see if her fingers bleed? Who will test the sweet smell in the tomb of Marilyn Monroe? Who will slip with James Cagney's head?" (205), whereas local saints like Catherine Tekawitha become objects of consumption: "Catherine Tekawitha, what care we if they cast you in plaster? (…) And what if there is a plastic reproduction of your little body on the dashboard of every Montréal taxi?" (5). American pop songs, comic books, and movies are the texts of a new religion that substitutes the spirit for the flesh, and celebrates the return to magic and collective emotion. Individual intellect, as Söderlind wrote, is sacrificed for magic: "Pop culture becomes the new religion, but through a transubstantiation performed by the magic of the word. And again we are faced with the convergence of mystery and orality" (*Canadian Cryptic*,1991: 96).

Furthermore, American culture is fresh, new, and far away from history and politics. It is a 'provocative' element that attacks high culture discourses and abolishes distinctions among cultural expressions. In this regard, Cohen elaborates a complex interplay where

> high culture elements and high culture-discourses (often Canadian: Canadian literature, Canadian politics and Canadian history) are subverted by the intrusion of a low-culture element or low-culture discourse (most of the time American: Comic books, advertisements rhetorics, Hollywood Westerns) (Lebold 2003: 169).

For example, religious poetry such as E.J Pratt's poem 'Brébeuf and Lalament' -which narrates the tortures and tragic deaths of two Jesuits- is parodied when used for masturbation and sexual arousal; its high style and serious tone turns into pornography in modern Quebec. On the other hand, a comic stripe of a Charles Axis advertisement enters into heaven and "Four thick black words appear in they sky and they radiate spears of light" (Cohen 2001: 73). The comic book advertisement promises a perfect body using the Charles Axis method, which parodies the Charles Atlas' books of 1940's: "Charles Axis is all compassion, he's our sacrifice! He calls the thin but he means both the fat and thin" (72). Nonetheless, the vulgarity and mock tone of the comic advertisement turns into seriousness: the physical mediocrity of the narrator leads him to suffering; just as Edith -in an another episode- languishes for the slim legs of the coupon she hides in her drawer.

Both episodes are parodies that introduce Bakhtin's concept of 'the carnivalesque', a translated term used in the works of the Russian critic to describe the process of subversion and consequent liberation from those assumptions that reign in the dominant style. Bakhtin supports his view in his books *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965) by referring to the festivity of the Medieval carnival -Feast of Fools- where the sacramental ceremonies held in French cathedrals where mocked by those officials of the lowest rank; in this regard, the Russian critic links the concept of 'the carnivalesque' in literature with the popular celebrations of carnival, where both conventions and hierarchies were overturned for one day. It exists, then, no authority to acknowledge what is serious and transcendental; and this is precisely what *Beautiful Losers* emphasizes:

> In a novel like Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers,* the social and literary inversions are typically carnivalesque: the religion of the spirit gives way to the religion of the flesh, complete with its own saints (sexy movie stars) and sacred texts (pornography and sex manuals). The official church discourse -specifically that of prayer and of the Jesuit chronicles -is paradoxically

> inverted in form and content. There is a specific and wholesale transfer from the elevated, spiritual, ideal plane to the material and bodily reality of life (Hutcheon 1988: 30).

The new religion of the flesh -or what Bakhtin calls 'the material bodily lower stratum' (1984: 23)- explains Cohen's overuse of a sexual and sensual prose, which forces readers to confront sexuality: "Undress, undress, I want to cry out, let's look at each other" (Cohen 2001: 14). According to Hutcheon, Cohen attempts with this language to "get us back in touch with our bodies -and with the language of our bodies" (1988: 31); he wants to reclaim sex and its verbal counterpart as a subject matter for 'serious' literature. This rejection to separate art from bodily realities brings back Bakhtin's literary concept of 'the carnivalesque': if American culture is 'carnivalised' by overturning hierarchies and subverting the serious for the comical, Cohen's insistence on bodily functions and 'obscene' words represents as well an attempt to free literature from its limitations, since "there are no dirty words … ever!", as Cohen himself recognized in the documentary film *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* (1965). The Montreal writer's attempt to create a new sensibility towards literature, as well as his efforts to question hierarchies place *Beautiful Losers* already in the realms of the Postmodern.

4.2. Canadian Postmodern

In an interview with Phyllis Webb and Eli Mandel, cited in Michael Ondaatje's study of Cohen's work, Cohen answered about *Beautiful Losers:*

> I was writing a liturgy (…) a great mad confessional prayer, but using all the techniques of the modern novel which was the discipline in which I was trained (…) *Beautiful Losers* was everything I could give at the time, cos I had nothing to lose. I really wasn't interested in guarding anything (1970: 45).

With these words Cohen recognizes his interest in writing a contemporary novel from the 1960's rather than to continue with the modernist tradition that still prevailed in Canada and made of him the 'golden boy' of Canadian poetry with his early works. He wanted to write a book with "all the techniques of the modern novel", and he definitively managed to do it with *Beautiful Losers,* while he inaugurated at the same time a new narrative tradition: the Canadian postmodern.

Postmodernism is a philosophical and ambiguous concept that describes the movement in the arts that follows Modernism. The term comprises different cultural tendencies and associated movements that generally offer sceptical interpretations of art, architecture, culture, literature, philosophy, economics, fiction, and literary criticism. The concept, which gained popularity in the twentieth century under the influence of post-structuralist thought and deconstruction, cannot be understood without a "sensitivity to polysemy" (Thomson 2011: 126). Polysemy suggests 'multiple meanings', but as Ian Thomson writes: "the postmodern is even in danger of meaning too much" (2011: 126). In this sense, the adjective 'postmodern' is nowadays used not only to describe philosophical ideas but to refer to a vast collection of cultural products that were once ignored but now find shelter under a culture which abolishes distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art. Thus, pop music, movies, comic books or even religion are analysed through postmodernist lens. However, the term becomes blurry and saturated, so in order to understand the multiplicity of postmodernism, it is paradoxically necessary to list some of its senses. According to Thomson (2011: 129-134):

1- To be *postmodern* means *to seek passage beyond modernity.* Therefore, postmodernity is not a new age that comes after modernity, but a reaction against the modern assumptions that have disastrously modelled the world and still remain applicable. To be postmodern, then, "is to be on the way or in transition toward another understanding and approach to being" (2011: 129).

2- Postmodernism is usually taken to mean an "incredulity toward metanarratives", as Lyotard wrote in *The Postmodernist condition* (1979).

Narratives are stories through which we make sense of our lives; they discern meaning in the events of our historical path. Therefore, a metanarrative would be "a perspective from which we could adjudicate between the different and competing narratives currently struggling with one another to tell us our story the most authoritatively" (131). In this sense, postmodernism is associated with relativism, since we cannot adopt a concrete angle and reasonably interpret the historical situation.

3- Postmodernism is often taken to connote *the fragmentation of the subject.* The work of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud suggest, each in different way, "that the heroic modern conception of an autonomous subject firmly in control of an objective world was an illusion" (134). Respect -Marx-, power -Nietzsche-, and erotic fulfilment -Freud- are the unconscious forces that domain our subjectivity. Thus, the individual is no more an autonomous subject.

These are three senses of the concept 'postmodernism', but different meanings emerge due to its polysemic nature. In the field of literature this tendency is often represented by techniques of fragmentation, irony and paradox, unreliable narrators, and intertextuality. Furthermore, postmodern literature converges with critical theory and becomes associated with deconstruction and reader-response approaches, where there is a subversion of the 'implicit contract' between author, text, and reader; authors frequently use metafictional narratives that undermine the writer's authority, there are no final answers, indeed, the notion of 'final answer' becomes suspicious in contrast with modernist works with tied-up endings. Also, the postmodern sensibility questions the boundaries between 'low' and 'high' culture, then these texts often combine both expressions and constitute a 'pastiche' where different genres and discourses intermingle.

Some of the writers whom inspired Cohen to write *Beautiful Losers* are believed to be representative figures of the postmodern, such as Samuel Beckett, W.S Burroughs, or Alexander Trocchi. But the Postmodernism, which was formed out of North and South American cultures, offers "a new context in which to view the specificities of Canadian writing" (Hutcheon

1988: viii). These specificities emerge from the lack of a geographical centre and the strong influence of Europeans and Americans, who create "perennial tensions" (Mandel 1986: 15) that affect the way Canadians view their history and literature. This lack of geographical and cultural centre leads the country to the "total ambiguity that is so essentially Canadian: be in terms of two solitudes, the bush garden, Jungian opposites" (Kroetsch, as cited in Hutcheon 1988: 4).

This ambiguity is explored in *Beautiful Losers* by means of techniques such as paradox, irony and contradiction; indeed, these literary devices appear frequently in 'Commonwealth literatures', since they serve to illustrate the dualities emerged in societies "caught between two worlds" (Hutcheon 1991: 81). Canada participates in the idea of 'commonwealth' literature that signals the sense of 'foreignness' and 'doubleness' of the postcolonial experience. For Hutcheon:

> At its best, the ironic stance provokes a serious deliberation into the problems that led to dualities in the first place. This involves a re-viewing of colonial and post-colonial history through the doubled lenses of ironic defamiliarization: in Canada, Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* remains perhaps the most powerful example of this process. The contradictions and heterogeneous dualities that make up the post-colonial experience also resonate with the paradoxes and multiplicities of the postmodern, and, in both, irony seems to be a preferred trope for the articulation of that doubleness (1991: 82).

The post-colonial experience is, thus, aligned with the Canadian postmodern by means of irony, and challenges at the same time the humanist universals that until that moment had placed Canadian literature in a rather marginal place. In this regard, Cohen had already emphasized 'marginal' literature in *The Favourite Game* with the writing of Breavman in napkins, but in *Beautiful Losers* he goes a step beyond and shows a preference for writing in the margins rather than in the centre. In this sense, in "F's Invocation to History in the Middle Style" (Cohen 2001: 188) -a poem

written by F. in an explicitly drug-addict language- there is a set of footnotes reproduced in the next page that explain the jargon of drug-addiction; they represent a parody of scholarly writing with its multiple and pedantic explanations, but at the same time they are a "literalization of marginal writing" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 1991: 96), in which the emphasis is put on the margins of the page rather than the centre, perhaps to readdress "the balance between centre and periphery for the ex-centric writer" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 1991: 96). Therefore, Cohen proves to be an "ex-centric" writer that reclaims the importance of 'marginal' writing.

Another important concept in the Canadian Postmodern that allows writers to build an independent national literature is 'Historiographic metafiction', a term coined by Hutcheon that refers to "fiction that is intensely, self-reflexively art, but is also grounded in historical, social, and political realities" (1988: 13). This fiction is firmly rooted in historical facts, but it cannot be considered part of the historical genre due to metafictional constructions that reflect on the process of writing and reading. Among these constructions stand out the ones articulated by literary devices like parody and irony -double meaning structures that react against authority and reclaim originality-; they both engage with the social and historical past and signal the awareness "that literature is made, first and foremost, out of other literature" (Hutcheon 1988: 1). This awareness fosters different discourses -biography, history, religion, politics and philosophy- that intermingle and create a postmodern self-reflexibility: "it is a critical counterpointing or dialogue between the 'texts' of both history and art, done in such a way that it does not deny the existence or significance of either" (Hutcheon 1988: 14). Therefore, 'Historiographic metafiction' becomes highly postmodern and questions both historical and fictional discourses, while it provides at the same time "new narrative structures" (Pache 1985: 77) that modify the self-expression of the nation.

Beautiful Losers is an example of 'Historiographic metafiction': political and historical events that concern Canada and its colonial experience are frequently interrupted by metafictional comments on the reading and writing of the novel. This self-reflexibility of the work of art involves an ironic self-conscious of the text, for example, the narrator suddenly exclaims:

“O Reader, do you know that a man is writing this? A man like you” (102). This question interrupts I's account and reminds the reader that the narration is no more than a literary artifact that the author creates in order to be decoded by the reader. In fact, there are continuous references to the fictitious and manipulative nature of the novel: in one of the narrator's prayers, he exclaims in a strange capitalized sentence, “I Am A Creation In Your Morning Writing A Lot Of Words Beginning With Capitals” (54); F. as well asserts in his letter: “interpret me, go beyond me” (158), a demand addressed to the narrator but perfectly applicable to the reader.

The self-reflexibility of *Beautiful Losers* demands an active participation of a reader that encounters several difficulties along the narrative, such as contradictory informations, unexplained leaps in time, fantastic accounts, etc. The reader needs to make an effort to accept these indeterminacies and equate the fantastic to the real in the novel; she or he needs to eliminate as well the notion of 'historical time' that limits collective experience and prevents the reader from being aware of “the dimensions which are lost in the habitual fragmentation of experience” (Heidenreich 1989: 83), such as the separation of the erotic from the spiritual, and the rejection of 'magic' to explain rational behaviour.

The reader's expectations and 'appropriate' responses are constantly challenged. For example, when 'I's' wife dies squashed by the elevator used by the delivery boy from the “Bar-B-Q”, F. and 'I' do not seem to care: “Irony! We ordered chicken from the same place and we talked about my poor squashed wife, our fingers greasy, barbecue-sauce drops on the linoleum” (7). Cohen trivializes a serious event to the reader's surprise, who expects a more transcendental reaction. The reader needs to abandon habitual modes of perception and accept, thus, the intrusion of the grotesque and the fantastic in the narrative in order to make sense of Cohen's text.

Hutcheon shares this belief and views the reader of *Beautiful Losers* as a co-operator that needs to “'make sense' of the willed ambiguities, the paradoxes, even contradictions, of the text” (1980: 157). Cohen himself invites the reader to participate in the epilogue: “Welcome to you who read me today. Welcome to you who put my heart down. Welcome to you, darling and friend, who miss me forever in your trip to the end” (243). This sincere

invitation that contrasts with the sharpness of Baudelaire's famous prologue in *Fleurs du mal* -"Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère"- gives the reader the possibility to allow or not 'the second turn of the losers' that the Montreal inhabitants demand in the novel. For Hutcheon, the ending and the role of the reader are ambiguous: "perhaps he must become a beautiful loser, balancing the chaos of meaning" (1980: 161), or is he "caught between unresolved dualities?" (1974: 55).

The ambivalence of the ending guides the reader to the possibility of playfulness, a distinctive feature of postmodern literature that enhances the reader to 'play' with meanings rather than to restrict them. In fact, games -such as it occurred in *The Favourite Game*- play an important role throughout all the novel, since they represent an escape from the oppression of systems in which the narrator is trapped. For example, 'I' relies on movies when he wants to flee from his condition: "a movie will put me back in my skin because I've leaked all over the kitchen from all my holes, movie will stuff pores with white splinters and stop my invasion of the world" (64). And both the narrator and F. use an old factory as a playground for their games: "Come in, now and then. Sweep a little. Screw on the shiny tables. Play with the machines" (42). In this sense, movies, electric billiards, a Danish vibrator, etc., they are all games that subvert historical assumptions into new patterns beyond meaning; what matters is the playful exploration rather than the search for meaning.

In the novel, F. instructs the narrator to embrace these 'games': "Games are nature's most beautiful creation. All animals play games, and the truly Messianic vision of the brotherhood of creatures must be based in the idea of the game" (29). They acquire a new serious and transcendental dimension that converges with the notion of 'balance' of the saint, who does not establish connections but surrenders to "the laws of gravity and chance (…) A saint does not dissolve the chaos" (95). Therefore, both the saint and the player reject organization and discard connections in order to welcome free-play, then the reader needs as well to accept this playfulness and forget about fixed meanings and categories. They all need to accept the rules of the 'pinball game machines' located at the "Main Shooting and Game Alley"; machines which still have not been corrupted by the introduction of

“flippers” that deprave the game:

> There were a few yellow pinball machines of ancient variety, models from before the introduction of flippers. Flippers, of course, have destroyed the sport by legalizing the notion of the second chance. They have weakened the now-or-never nerve of the player and modified the sickening plunge of an unobstructed steel ball. Flippers represent the first totalitarian assault against Crime; by incorporating it into the game mechanically they subvert its old thrill and challenge. Since flippers, no new generation has mastered the illegal body exertions, and TILT, once as honorable as a saber scar, is no more important than a foul ball. The second chance is the essential criminal idea; it is the lever of heroism, and the only sanctuary of the desperate. But unless it is wrenched from fate, the second chance loses its vitality, and it creates no criminals but nuisances, amateur pickpockets rather than Prometheans. Homage to the Main Shooting and Game Alley, where a man can still be trained (237).

However, the so-called 'second chance' that the old man refuses in the “Main shooting Game Alley” is the same that the narrator and Montreal inhabitants reclaim; indeed, the reader needs to make use of it to give sense to Cohen's complex text.

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Due to Cohen's novel complexity, it might be convenient to turn attention into the structure of the novel, which is divided in three parts: “The History of them All”, written in the first-person voice of the folklorist historian, “A Long Letter from F.”, addressed to the narrator and written by F. from the occupational-therapy room of the mental institution, and the third part, “An Epilogue in the Third Person”, narrated by a detached third person.

Book one captures the voice of the narrator: it is a journal divided into

fifty-two sections of varying length in which the scholar expresses his thoughts and feelings. However, his entries are confusing and difficult to follow due to the disintegration of language:

> Foreign languages are a good corset. Get your hand off yourself. Edith Edith Edith long things forever Edith Edith cuntie Edith where you little Edith Edith Edith Edith Edith stretchy on E E E octopus complexion purse Edith lips lips area thy panties Edith Edith (…) (64).

He barely manages to produce firm verbal structures to support his discourse, and his language disintegration represents his mental state -alienated and disconnected from the world-. For Hutcheon: "Neither his ideas nor his language ever takes shape firmly, despite his academic roots in the past" (1974: 43). On the other hand, F.'s letter in Book two follows epistolary conventions: it has an addressee and addresser, as well as a heading and closure. Despite F. is confined in a mental institution his mind seems to work properly in comparison with the one of the scholar. He uses a clear and assertive language as a tool for his teachings, so even in his last writing piece, he tries to instruct the narrator: "Go beyond my style. I am nothing but a rotten hero" (164). Finally, the Epilogue describes the last days of an old man who is apparently a new-self of 'I', since he lives in the same tree-house where he spent his last years thinking about F. and Edith. However, this old man might be F. as well, since his burnt hand reminds the reader about the incident with Queen's Victoria Statue. As Scobie wrote:

> The old man who descends from the tree-house is *I* emerging from his timeless ordeal, his hands still burnt from the firecrackers (239); is F escaped from his asylum, his thumb blown off in the explosion (239); is Catherine's uncle (232); is someone who has given up eating (238), like Catherine (192, 200) and like Edith (200); is Osiris coming out of his tamarisk; is Christ descending from his 'lonely wooden tower'; is *IF,* all possibilities merged (1978: 122).

The old man -or as Scobie named him *IF*- becomes the merging of all the identities that the reader has encountered along the narrative. Thus, the narrative cannot longer be in the first person of Book one, or in F's second person in the letter he addresses to the narrator; it is instead a detached third person that becomes omnipresent in the last part of the novel.

The narrative does not follow a linear development in *Beautiful Losers,* in fact all the action is displayed in the first pages of the novel when the narrator longs for the sainthood of Catherine Tekawitha and remembers the deaths of her wife Edith and his friend F. For Ondaatje,

> the rest of the novel simply digs deeper into the relationships of these four people. An ordered progression of scenes is blasted: key scenes come up again and again (…) Cohen keeps about twelve incidents going at the same time, and his succeeds in the control of his material" (1970: 49).

Thus, the plot of the novel is barely relevant and it is the narrative situation that keeps expanding in regard to these four characters, "or as if Cohen were constantly throwing the same four stones onto the floor and recording the new shapes and relationships each throw created" (Ondaatje 1970: 49). In Book one, the reader finds the voice of the nameless narrator, who keeps obsessing and thinking about the saint Tekawitha and his two dead friends confined in his basement apartment. In Book two, F writes his letter to the narrator from the mental institution in which he is locked: he explains him that all the torments he inflected where designed to make him advance in his education towards sainthood. F. also gives an account of how he transformed Edith's body into "the lovely wife whom you discovered performing extraordinary manicures in the barber shop" (159). Finally, he tells the narrator about the last days of the saint Catherine Tekawitha and the miracles she performed once dead. While writing the letter, F. fondles the nurse Mary Voolnd, who will help him to escape from the institution in

order to continue with his revolutionary action. In Book three, an old man recovers consciousness in a tree-house in the national forest; he looks filthy and tries to seduce a young boy, though the kid turns the man into the police. The man escapes into the highway and hitches until a young blonde woman picks him up; she is naked from the waist and demands him to practice on her oral sex while she is driving and tells him she is Isis in Greek. Then, the man in the System Theatre of Montreal watches a movie, but he only sees the spaces between the frames because he is blinking too fast, he goes out to the street and disappears by turning into a movie of Ray Charles. At the end, the last page of the novel is rendered to the Jesuits and Catherine Tekawitha.

The plot of *Beautiful Losers* is confusing since Cohen plays with the structure of the novel. The linear sequence in which the events of the story occur becomes blurry and difficult to follow; furthermore, there is no time and space convention; then, events go back and forth in history almost without notice. Time sequence is destroyed and the reader needs eventually to find unity in "the integrity of the images (...) outside the temporal and spatial confines of plot and character" (Hutcheon 1974: 42). Therefore, although the storyline of *Beautiful Losers* does not follow a chronological order and the time sequence is distorted in purpose, the novel is highly organized, "held tightly together by a network of images and connections" (Scobie 1978: 96).

In this network becomes crucial the role of intertextuality. As Cohen's biographer Sylvie Simmons acknowledged, the Montreal poet wrote the novel in the Greek island of Hydra accompanied by the music of Ray Charles' album *The Genius sings the Blues* (1961). The text, as Cohen once said to Susan Lumsden in the *Weekend Magazine* (Sept 12, 1970) was "written in blood: I sat down to my desk and said I would use only the books that were there: a rare book on Catherine Tekawitha (...), a 1943 Blue Beetle comic book and a few others" (Lumsden 1976: 72). Armed with these materials, Cohen claimed that he said to himself: "if I can't write, if I can't *blacken these pages*, then I really can't do anything" (as cited in Hutcheon 1988: 8).

These books play an important role in the text; on one hand, Catherine Tekawitha's portrayal is not made by Cohen attending to real historical

records; he used instead Edouard Lecompt's 1927 Jesuit textual chronicle of her in his *Une Vièrge Iroquoise Catherine Tekawitha: Le Lis des bords de la Mohawk et du St Laurent (1656-1680)*. For Hutcheon, this domain of the textual over the real in Catherine's portrait makes *Beautiful Losers* very postmodern, since "The textuality of history matches that of literature: that is, the only way we can now the past today is through its traces, its texts. This is one of the lessons of the postmodern" (1988: 14). Therefore, Cohen relies on other texts to build his own account; there are no new and original texts but reconstructions of the former ones. Leslie Monkmann corroborates with her research to what extent Cohen depends on textuality to describe First Nations culture and life:

> An investigation of Cohen's sources indicates that almost all of the details of Catherine's life are taken from Edouard Lecompte's *Une Vierge iroquoise Catherine Tekawitha: le Lis des bords de la Mohawk et du St. Laurent* (1656-1680). Though quotation, translation, and paraphrase, Cohen provides a full historical background for Catherine as seen by a Jesuit priest in 1927. The picture described on the first page of the novel matches detail by detail the portrait of Catherine which serves as frontispiece to Lecompte's book. Quotations ascribed to Father Cholonec, Chauchetière, and Remy are also restricted to citations appearing in this volume (as cited in Scobie 1978: 115).

What Cohen does with the Jesuits chronicles is the construction of his own hagiographic account where "the reader finds, assembled in the body of the novel, the celebratory chronicle of a life, brought down to mythic simplicity, with narration of miracles and inclusion of apocryphal miracle workings, some apparently of Cohen's own invention" (Lebold 2003: 164). Thus, Cohen not only writes the story of three contemporary Montreal inhabitants but the hagiography of a saint by means of 'I', F., and Edith's narratives.

At the same time, the Montreal writer introduces intertexts of Indian legends that reclaim the return to magic and nature. Some of these stories are 'The Andacwandet', or 'fuck cure', a ceremony that heals Catherine's

uncle and consists of a sexual encounter among the youth of the tribe. The orgy takes place in the long house -metaphorically linked with the Movie Theater- where the uncle contemplates the scene and sings an ancient prayer: "I change / I am the same" (131). Catherine's relative is miraculously cured, and even the Iroquois virgin find the ceremony "acceptable". Indeed, this episode reminds the reader of F.'s quest to 'fuck a saint' in modern Montreal, since they both are rituals aimed at recovering the magic of the tribal group by means of a religious-sexual practice.

Another Indian legend in *Beautiful Losers* is the 'brain-removal' operation -"a necessary preparation for immortality" (184)- that Oscotarach performs in his hut to eradicate intellect, reject rationality, and embrace true emotion:

> Beside the path there is a bark hut. In the hut lives Oscotarach, the Head-Piercer. I will stand beneath him and he will remove the brain from my skull. This he does to all the skulls which pass by. It is the necessary preparation for the Eternal Hunt" (114).

The story seduces 'I', who expresses his desire to "be consumed by unreason. I want to be swept along" (146), so again Indian tradition connects with contemporary Montreal; in fact, the old man of the epilogue recovers his consciousness -probably after a "long and clumsy operation"- in the tree-house that F. and 'I' described previously as a hut. For Söderlind, F. is the 'Head-Piercer' and 'I' is his victim (*Margin/Alias* 1991: 48). F.'s lessons turn to be part of the process of the narrator's brain removal, who needs to abandon rationality to celebrate instead the wholeness of flesh and life.

The other book that Cohen cites in the aforementioned interview is the 1943 Blue Beetle comic book, which finds echoes in the narrative of *Beautiful Losers* with the continuous presence of comic book talk and onomatopoeic dialogues, such as this one from F's letter:

> -Is it happening, Mary?

-Yes, F.
-Grrrrr! Chomp! Arararara! Erf!
-Mary!
-Run, F.! Run. Run!
-Bow wow! Hoooowwwwllll! Grrrrrrr! R-i-i-i-i-p! (226).

This 'pop-language' coincides with the presence of comic heroes like Charles Axis (Atlas) -who appears in the bodybuilding advertisement-, the Plastic Man whom the narrator imagines to be in the erotic separatist rally: "I swear that we were Plastic Man and Plastic Woman, because I seemed to be able to reach her everywhere, and she traveled through my underwear effortlessly" (120); or the Blue Beetle that 'I' dreamt to be in detriment to Charles Axis:

> The truth! You disdained the coupon because of the sin of pride, didn't you. Charles Axis wasn't enough for you. In your greedy brain you cherished an unspeakable desire. You wanted to be Blue Beetle. You wanted to be Captain Marvel. You wanted to be Plastic Man. Robin wasn't even good enough for you, you wanted to be Batman" (116).

This comic-book universe belongs to the popular culture of the sixties, where other media like the radio or cinema started to gain relevance in detriment to written modes of expression. Cohen introduces these new electronic realities by means of intertextuality: in the radio, songs of Gavin Gate are presented as theatrical pieces, Top ten's are "removed so abruptly from history, cut off from the dynamic changes of jukebox stock market" (110), and the radio itself interrupts F's letter and asks for revenge:

> This is the radio speaking. Eeeek! Tee hee! This is the ah ha ha, this is the hee hee, this is the radio speaking. Ha ha ha ha ha ha, oh, ho ho, ha ha ha ha ha ha, it tickles, it tickles! (Sound effect: echo chamber) This is the radio

speaking. Drop your weapons! This is the Revenge of the Radio" (226).

On the other hand, movies play a distinctive role in *Beautiful Losers;* they are a source of pain that remind the narrator of his paralysis and lack of rewarding experiences, as 'F' claims: "modern art-cinema house (…) is nothing but the death of an emotion. No marriage in these stark confines, everybody sitting on their genitals because: silver genitals on the screen" (22). Nevertheless, cinema is at the same time responsible for compassion and knowledge, a truly vehicle to achieve empathy: "You know what pain looks like, that kind of pain, you've been inside newsreel Belsen" (194). Experience is what thus matters, not the movie itself but the projection beam and the black spaces between the frames that enable the protagonists to be *inside* the newsreel. In this regard, movies symbolize the "postmodern emphasis (...) on the process, not the product, of belief" (Hutcheon 1988: 34), what in McLuhan's words is translated into "the medium is the message", a notorious sentence coined in his work *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (1964) that referred precisely to the importance of the medium in communicating a message, since it is ultimately the medium what matters.

These multiple manifestations of intertextuality -footnotes, advertisements, coupons, religious poetry, comic-books, pornography, pop songs, movies, etc.- had made of *Beautiful Losers* a 'mosaic novel' with "bits and pieces" (Duffy 1986: 57). Cohen employs a technique that resembles clearly to the one of a collage in which the creator mixes and presents different materials altogether. This 'collage' is perfectly glued by the drive that runs throughout all the novel: desire.

4.3. An Interpretation of Desire

Cohen explores in *Beautiful Losers* both spiritual and erotic desire in different realms such as language, mythology, personal relationships, etc. The articulation of desire in *Beautiful Losers* is restricted by the use of language. Both the narrator and F. find English insufficient to express

emotion: “We who cannot dwell in the Clear Light, we must deal with symbols” (Cohen 2011: 185). Everyday speech is not valid to communicate the longings of the heart and to come into terms with 'truth', so 'I' asks Catherine Tekawitha to speak him in Iroquois -the language that expresses her own circumstances rather than the ones of the outside world-:

> They (the Iroquois) had developed a new dimension to conversation. They ended every speech with the word *hiro*, which means: like I said. Thus each man took full responsibility for intruding into the inarticulate murmur of the spheres. To the *hiro* they added the word *koué,* a cry of joy or distress, according to whether it was sung or howled. Thus they essayed to pierce the mysterious curtain which hangs between all talking men: at the end of every utterance a man stepped back, so to speak, and attempted to interpret his words to the listener, attempted to subvert the beguiling intellect with the noise of true emotion. Catherine Tekawitha, speak to me in *Hiro- Koué* (8).

Iroquois is the language of emotion and the one of the narrator's desire, who prepares lists of words translated into English and French, and he actually attempts to speak it to defy colonial practices. What most fascinates the narrator is “the subjective, emotional value of 'the saying'” (39), which stands over the fixed categories of the proposition uttered. In contrast to English or French, Iroquois language becomes a valid vehicle to express the hidden meanings of '”all talking men”.

The act of speech reveals both the action and the agent, who takes full responsibility of 'the saying'. Therefore, what matters in Iroquois is the speech rather than the writing. Orality is the traditional means of communication in First Nations tribes, Cohen respects this condition and vindicates the vernacular with the voices and traditions of the Mohawk's tribe. Nevertheless, Cohen transfers this orality to Modern Montreal with the phrase book for tourists that F. gained for “an oral favor ... performed for a restaurateur friend” (71).

F. gives the book to 'I', who reproduces a page of it at the end of his

journal, i.e., at the last page of “The History of Them All”. The page book collects different possibilities of conversation in a drugstore that deal with cures for different diseases; it is divided into two columns that contain the Greek original and the English translation. The last word of the dialogue is “Eucharisto”, written in Greek characters and translated into English with a plain 'thanks'. This translation introduces the dualism between the sacred and the profane, since the Greek symbols -incomprehensible for the English speaker- carry the religious overtones of the act of 'grace' in which disciplines give thanks to Jesus. In Söderlind's words:

> The Eucharistie intertext is hidden behind the unfamiliarity, at least to the anglophone reader, of the Greek letters, which turns the word into a pure signifier in a manner reminiscent of the Akan proverbs and Ama's song in *The New Ancestors,* and which is both profaned and implicitly parodied in the translation which reduces the mystery of the Eucharist to an empty "thank you" (*Canadian Cryptic* 1991: 95-96).

The 'sacred-profane dichotomy', a concept coined by the sociologist Émile Durkheim in his work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), distinguishes in religious systems what it is ideal and transcends everyday reality -the sacred- from that which belongs to the realm of routine experience -the profane-, so it gathers mundane and individual activities. In the example above, the Greek text -the sacred- is 'perverted' by the English translation -the profane-, while it brings back at the same time the problematic of naming and colonizing, since English language 'destroys' the sacramentality of Greek and introduces “the 'shit' of history and memory” (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 1991: 62). However, the profanity induced by English offers at the same time the possibility of revelation, since “it is translation, in the sense of being carried over, that allows for the anamorphic seeing from the position of the other in which empty phrases become prayers and the 'akropolis rose' can be seen” (Söderlind *Margin/Alias* 1991: 63). Therefore, the profane becomes along with the sacred the path to reach

truth and eternity, i.e., to uncover the veil of Isis.

The narrator refers to the phrase book as a prayer book; it captures the sacred and the profane, in other words, the spirit and body coexist in the same text throughout the original Greek and the English translation. As F. declares when he gives the phrase book to the narrator: "It is a prayer book. Your need is greater than mine (…) prayer is translation. A man translates himself into a child asking for all there is in a language he has barely mastered. Study the book" (56). Since English language and translations are confusing, it is not surprising that I's prayers along *Beautiful Losers* are chaotic, unrelated, and difficult to understand. As Heidenreich wrote, "In I's 'prayers,' a multiplicity of seemingly unrelated elements are jumbled together in an abstruse mixture of curiously formulated banality (…) and poetic and spiritual invocation" (1989: 92).

Prayers are both written in Greek and English, but at the beginning of the phrase book only English is used. In this part, Catherine Tekawitha acts in the narrator's imagination as a shop assistant in different situations -a wash house, tobacconist, barber's shop, post-office and booksellers-; she tries to assist a Greek customer in an English-speaking environment, but communication problems put an end to the conversation and silence brings prayer back. At the end of these dialogues, the narrator invokes God rather than Catherine Tekawitha, "Oh God, I grow silent as I hear myself begin to pray" (180). Then, the phrase book page with the original Greek and the translated English is displayed as a means to portray the narrator's prayers, which are no more than his escape from the confines of language and reality.

Despite the effort that Cohen dedicates to affirm orality in *Beautiful Losers,* the prayer-book reminds the reader of the ultimately printed nature of the novel. Cohen's preference for 'historiographic metafiction' shows the reader the visuality of the literary work: for example, at the end of F's letter, the novelist employs capital letters in order to emphasis the printed nature of the medium: "(DOLLY IN TO CLOSE-UP OF THE RADIO ASSUMING THE FORM OF PRINT) – This is the radio speaking. Good evening. The radio easily interrupts this book to bring you a recorded historical newsflash: TERRORIST LEADER AT LARGE" (225-226). The radio -an oral means of communication- acquires a printed nature in *Beautiful Losers.* Therefore, as

Söderlind wrote, the text "is founded on the interdependence of the visual and the oral" (*Margin/Alias*, 1991: 65).

This division between the written and oral nature of *Beautiful Losers* is portrayed in the novel with the distinction between the 'old' and 'new' language. The 'old' language is the one of historical names, the Jesuits, and modern Canada. It is a language close to the print form -i.e. to Marshall McLuhan's 'Gutenberg Galaxy'- since it relies on the individual rather than the community. In the following fragment, the voice of the tribe is silenced in favour of individual thought:

> Now what about this silence we are so desperate to clear in the wilderness? Have we labored, plowed, muzzled, fenced so that we might hear a Voice? Fat chance. The Voice comes out of the whirlwind, and long ago we hushed the whirlwind. I wish that you would remember that the Voice comes out of the whirlwind (…) Wit, invention, shhh, shhh, now do you see we've soundproofed the forest, carved benches round the wild arena? (148).

The sound 'shhh, shhh' silences nature and 'the other' is excluded in order to protect the individual; there are no foreign voices to threaten one's discourse. F. associates this sound with the male subjectivity that dominates and excludes 'the other', in contrast with the female 'hiss':

> It is the very opposite of a hiss, the sound men make. It is Shhh, the sound made around the index finger raised to the lips. Shhh, and the roofs are raised against the storm, Shhh, the forests are cleared so the wind will not rattle the trees. Shhh, the hydrogen rockets go off to silence dissent and variety (…?) Shhh, will everybody listen, please. Will the animals stop howling, please. Will the belly stop rumbling, please. Will Time call off its ultrasonic dogs, please.
>
> It is the sound my ball pen makes on the hospital paper (…?) Shhh, it says to the billion unlines of whiteness. Shhh, it whispers to the white chaos, lie down in dormitory rows. Shhh, it implores the dancing molecules, I love

dances but I do not love foreign dances, I love dances that have rules, my rules" (147).

Nevertheless, this 'old' language causes pain and suffering in F. and the narrator: "Never mind, never mind. I've gone too deep into the old language. It may trap me there" (163). The language is both linked with the masculine principle of the sound 'shhh' and the notion of 'History', which trap the protagonists into an emotionless system that leads them to alienation.

In order to overcome the insufficiencies of the 'old' language and welcome the 'otherness' that enables the expression of real emotion, a new praxis of language is demanded. This 'new' language, "would both be and not be language and its opposite; it would say and stutter the unsayable, would visualize the invisible, and come into being at the boundary *between* the language of the self and its unknown other" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 1991: 49). Therefore, it requires the female sound 'hiss' and the return to the orality of the tribal group -to McLuhan's 'Global Village'-. An example of this language is found in the episode of the Mohawk's dance, in which the boy and girls of the tribe "do not hear the individual noises shhh, hiss, they hear the sound of the sounds together, they behold the interstices flashing up and down the cone of the flowering whirlwind" (150).

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The aforementioned 'new' language is nothing else than the incorporation of the feminine principle to the masculine one, so they both converge into the expression of desire. The principle of the feminine is embodied in Isis, the Egyptian goddess of truth venerated as well in the Greco-Roman tradition. Isis stands as the ideal mother and wife that shelters the most vulnerable; the Greek mythology accounts how she healed her both brother and husband Osiris by reconstructing his body and bringing him back to

life. In *Beautiful Losers,* the goddess appears at the end of the novel, she is the blond woman naked from the waist that picks up the old man in the highway. She reveals her identity -lifts her veil- in Greek language:

> -Have you any idea who I am?
> -Ubleubluebleubleuble-none-ubleubleubleuble.
> -Guess! Guess! You thatch of shit!
> -I'm not in the least interested.
> - **I** σιϛ εγϖ-
> -Foreigners bore me, Miss (235).

But this mysterious woman not only represents the Egyptian goddess, but the rest of female characters in the novel: she is a virgin that wears Catherine's moccasins and refuses to marry, but on the other hand, she is the sexual goddess that Edith claims to be in the climax of her most extreme sexual scene, "I am Isis, I am all things which have been, and are, and shall be, and no mortal has lifted my robe" (107); in fact, this declaration is made in Greek language and there is no translation provided in the novel.

Isis encompasses as well the figure of the healer in Egyptian mythology. In *Beautiful Losers,* women incarnate the same disposition to help: Mary Voolnd is the blonde nurse that heals patients in the mental institution, Catherine is the virgin that cures diseases and saves souls, and Edith is the merciful woman who does not doubt to help strangers in distress. Women are, thus, the incarnation of compassion and helpfulness; they sacrifice themselves for the other and once they are dead, they bring magic and mercy to the world: 'I' manages to escape from his condition of solitary scholar, 'F' is rescued when Mary Voolnd is "devoured by police dogs", and Catherine Tekawitha performs miracles after her death.

Therefore, Isis is not just the blond woman of the Epilogue, she is the principle where extremes like Edith and Catherine Tekawitha converge: the total erotization of the body coexists with a fervent religious devotion. Furthermore, Isis represents the unity of all things and incorporates different

modes of living into her worship. She is the "many-named", or as Hutcheon suggests, "an ironic parody of the Universal mother" (1974: 52).

The veil of Isis represents a central concept in *Beautiful Losers*. It is by lifting this veil that the protagonist completes his quest, gets rid of history and memory, and consequently achieves sainthood. Isis's veil used to be in the Greek and Roman periods associated with mystery cults that kept the statue of the goddess hidden under a veil. In the novel, the narrator constantly refers in his journal to his desire to see what is under Tekawitha's blanket: "I want to know what goes on under that rosy blanket. Do I have any right? I fell in love with a religious picture of you" (3). This desire is connected with the Greek word 'apocalypse', which the narrator defines as "that which is revealed when the woman's veil is lifted" (98):

> It comes from the Greek *apokalupsis,* which means revelation. This derives from the Greek *apokaluptein,* meaning uncover or disclose. *Apo* is a Greek prefix meaning from, derived from. *Kaluptein* means to cover. This is cognate with *kalube* which is cabin, and *kalumma* which means woman's veil. Therefore apocalyptic describes that which is revealed when the woman's veil is lifted. What have I done, what have I not done, to get under your blanket, Kateri Tekawitha? (98-99).

This lifting of the veil or blanket affirms the duality of *Beautiful Losers,* or in this case the convergence of the sacred and profane, since the act of "lifting the veil" is on one hand associated with the spiritual and romantic quest of the narrator, but on the other hand it symbolizes the sexual desire and the scholar's attempt to "fuck a saint"; or in other words, "to go down a saint", words which directly allude to the act of oral sex performed by the old man to the blonde woman of the epilogue, who asks him: "-You filthy heap! Eat me!" (234). The woman, or Isis as she calls herself, is the saint to whom the narrator or *IF* 'goes down' to gain his sainthood and transcend historical time. The veil is, thus, entirely removed and "becomes another metaphor for finding the truth about being" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 1991:

47). In this regard, Cohen is not only asking the readers to see under the saint's blanket, but to see through "the textual 'veil'", a hidden level of meaning that requires a close look to the text based on "intra rather than extra-textual patterns of signification" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 1991: 47). Actually, the 'lifting of the veil' is finally textual, since Cohen destroys the confinements of reading and writing with an epilogue written in a detached third person that interrupts the narrative and the sense of historical time previously found in "The History of Them All" and "A Long letter from F.".

Nevertheless, the 'lifting of the veil' might have in *Beautiful Losers* a political intention already announced in the epigraph of the novel with a Ray Charles' verse from the song *Ol' Man River:* "Somebody said lift that bale". The word 'bale', as Söderlind wrote, is phonetically similar to 'veil', actually, in modern Greek the letter 'b' is pronounced as 'v' (*Canadian Cryptic* 1991: 96). This song, written for a musical that denounced the hardships of African Americans, suggests that the 'lifting the veil' stand as as a political allegory: the 'veil' or 'blanket' in the song is the one that covers and perpetuates "the slavery and colonization of the 'nègres blancs d'Amerique,' as well as of Indians and Jews, all of the 'second chancers'" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 1991: 64). Therefore, at the end of the novel the old man descends from the treehouse, meets the blond woman in the highway, and finally visits the System Theatre and turns into a Ray Charles' movie. Ray Charles -the blind musician and American icon- invades Montreal's heaven with his piano and dissolves the history of Quebec. He represents the complete fusion with the beyond and the final turn of the losers: "All the second chancers rushed in, the divorced, the converted, the overeducated, they all rushed in for their second chance, karate masters, adult stamp collectors, Humanists, give us, give us our second chance!" (Cohen 2001: 240-241). But for Hutcheon, however, Cohen "posits an ultimate 'beautiful loser', Ray Charles" (1985: 159). The musician is both a victim -he is black and blind- and a symbol of the oppression that Canadians suffer from American culture. He "is doubly colonized -by an enslaving nation and the white race." (Hutcheon 1985: 159). Therefore, Ray Charles' image is no more than the validation of the system of victors and victims in which the 'losers' remain losers, and the 'victors' remain victors in an inescapable circle of

enslavement.

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Both Isis and the old man of the epilogue represent respectively the convergence of the female and male characters of *Beautiful Losers.* This convergence demands a loss of the individual in favour of collective emotion, but the society in which 'I' and his friends live sets a "great value on individuality, the preservation of the unique personality" (Scobie 1970: 56). This individualism is the result of the inter-relation of democratic, capitalistic, and protestant systems that enhance individual reason instead of collective emotion. These systems protect on one side uniqueness and individual identity, but on the other hand foster the loneliness and alienation of the narrator. In the novel, F's lessons are aimed at destroying this individuality "in favor of some vaster, more inhuman, but not higher purpose" (Hutcheon 1974: 49). This purpose -'the loss of the self'- involves the suppression of responsibility, the rejection of rationality, and the acceptance of Magic as the principle that rules the world.

Magic is opposed to history, it incorporates miracles and becomes the stem for all religious systems: "God is alive. Magic is afoot" (Cohen 2001: 157). Faith is replaced by magic, which becomes the greatest power in the novel to which 'I' is guided in his transformation towards sainthood. However, what F. demands from his friend is not to control this power, but to be the power itself: "Here is a plea based on my whole experience: do not be a magician, be magic" (157). This demand responds to the notion of the saint that seeks "balance in the chaos of existence": whereas the magician controls miracles and exerts power to arrange the world in order, which is both "arrogant and warlike", the saint instead is magic itself and connects with the "ordinary eternal machinery", like the old man of the epilogue, who "loses all human identity and merges with the magical form of reality, cinema" (Scobie 1970: 60).

Nevertheless, the protagonists of *Beautiful Losers* seek this magic by means

of two opposite systems: the religion of the flesh and of the spirit. Both extremes lead the individual to destruction, Edith and F. died of "too much dirty sex" (Cohen 2001: 4), but Catherine Tekawitha killed herself with her devotion to God. Sexuality and religion become therefore part of the tyrannical and victimizing systems of History. This oppression is particularly committed to female characters. On one hand, Edith is an eminently sexual creature designed by F: "I will tell you how we, Edith and I, constructed the lovely wife" (159). F. cures Edith's acne with his

> famous soap collection"; furthermore, he admits that "her buttocks were my masterpiece. Call her nipples an eccentric extravagance, but the bum was perfect. It's true that from year to year it required electronic massage and applications of hormone mold, but the conception was perfect" (165).

However, F.'s attempt to fabricate the perfect body in which "All flesh can come" (Cohen 2001: 32) fails when Edith admits, "I can't make myself come any more. I'm not ready for the other stuff yet. It makes me too lonely. I feel blurred. Sometimes I forget where my cunt is" (167). She feels dismembered and broken, not only in her body but in her personality, which is always annihilated in favour of the sexual experience. The Danish Vibrator of the Argentinian orgy ends reducing her to "nothing but a buffet of juice, flesh, excrement, muscle to serve its appetite" (179); actually, she dies squashed by the elevator of her basement apartment.

On the other hand, Catherine's tortured body represents the extreme of the religious system. Her love to God makes her to refuse marriage and commit herself to the virginity and self-mortification of the flesh. She inflicts on her radical corporal punishments that satisfy the sadistic impulses of the Jesuits, and at the end of the novel, "she even falls victim to the political power plays of Church and State" (Hutcheon 1974: 50); she is rented to the Jesuits and she becomes a mere "technicolour postcard" and "a plastic dashboard ornament" in modern Montreal. Therefore, she ends being a victim of her own radical behaviour, such as it happens with Edith and F.,

who seek to break systems and reach eternity. In fact, Catherine is fully as sexual as the protagonists of modern Montreal, and her mortifications and self-flagellations for religious purposes "could just as easily be the material of sado-masochistic pornography" (Scobie 1978: 110). Just as Edith and F. are slaves of the flesh, Catherine's love to God is so intense that she becomes her devoted servant: "My Jesus, I have to take chances with you. I love you but I have offended you. I am here to fulfill your law. Let me, my God, take the burden of your anger (...)" (199). Extremes converge in the desperate satisfaction of desire: "In some great eye I believe the candles are perfect currency, just as are all the Andacwandets, the Fuck Cures" (201).

On the other hand, the narrator is the character of the novel trapped between the systems of flesh and religion: on one side, he wants to deny the spirit and forget about history and rationality; he tries to assimilate F's lessons in order to stop suffering, "'Oh, F., do you think I can learn to perceive the diamonds of good amongst all the shit?' -It is all diamond" (8). However, 'I' not always manages to follow F.'s teachings and remains sexually frustrated and enslaved by reason. He wants to seek a system with an ordered vision instead of falter with F's maxim: "connect nothing". On the other side, the scholar knows the tortures and sufferings that Tekawitha suffered because of a "totally spiritual system, mechanized by the Jesuits into their political and plastic pawn" (Hutcheon 1974: 50). The rejection of the flesh becomes for him as dangerous as the one of the spirit, so instead of committing himself to one of these systems, he keeps seeking the "kind of balance that is his glory" (Cohen 2001: 95).

'I' -or the old man- manages at the end to find "this balance" and surpasses his teacher and friend F. It is paradoxical, then, the superiority that F. exhibits over the narrator throughout the novel: he is the born teacher that exercise his power over 'I', "Lie down, take it easy. Discipline yourself. Aren't you happy?" (11). Furthermore, F.'s continuous sermons and preachings belong to the system that the *Québécois* created to overcome I's pain:

> My methods may have been wrong, but I never stopped loving you. Was is selfish of me to try to end your pain (…) I saw pain everywhere. I could not

beat to look into your eyes, so maggoty were they with pain and desire (174).

These methods include extravagant episodes like the exaltation of warts in the orphanage, the Ottawa drive to the Parliament, or the contemplation of a miniature of the Akropolis painted in red, etc. What F. wants to achieve with these practices is to attack rational systems and awake the narrator's hysteria: "He was ready to use any damn method to keep me hysterical" (56). Furthermore, the *Québécois* wants to provoke jealousy in the narrator with his sexual encounters with Edith:

> -You lousy fucker, how many times, five or six?
> -Ah, grief makes us precise!
> -Five or six, five or six, five or six?
> -Listen, my friend, the elevator is working again.
> -Listen, F., don't give me any of your mystical shit.
> -Seven.
> -Seven times with Edith?
> -Correct.
> -You were trying to protect me with an optional lie?
> -Correct.
> -And seven itself might just be another option.
> -Correct (8).

F.'s methods deepen on the narrator's feelings towards his wife and F. himself. They cause pain in the narrator, who questions several times F's authority: "it's been too hard, too much crazy education, and God knows for what. Every second day I've had to learn something, some lesson, some lousy parable, and what am I this morning, a Doctor of Shit" (32). Furthermore, 'I' complains about F's artifices and "cheap koans" -which are paradoxical questions with no solution used in the Zen tradition to provoke the enlightenment of the student, who ultimately abandons the dependence on reason in order to come to terms with the irresolvable paradoxes-. Among

these 'koans', the one that specially puzzles the narrator is 'to fuck a saint', the paradox that concerns the virgin Catherine Tekawitha. The phrase represents the central metaphor of 'I's' ambitions, since it reunites sexuality and religion. However, the narrator does not fully comprehend F.'s impossible koan and does not manage to succeed in the task: “I merely wanted to fuck a saint, as F. advised. I don't why it seemed as such a good idea” (34).

F. ends recognizing his failures in the letter he addresses to the narrator: “I let History back because I was lonely. Do not follow. Go beyond my style. I am nothing but a rotten hero” (164). In fact, he treats him as his equal rather than his discipline: “We were born together, and in our kisses we confesses our longing to be born again. We lay in each other's arms, each of us the other's teacher” (154). Roles are reversed and 'I' becomes triumphant over his teacher, who begs him at the end: “I pray you, dear friend, interpret me, go beyond me.... Go forth, teach the world what I meant to be” (158). It is 'I's' mission, thus, to transcend history and become a saint, i.e., to be magic rather than a magician.

F. is the teacher and creator of a system that reclaims that “All parts of the body are erotogenic. Assholes can be trained with whips and kisses, that's elementary. Pricks and cunts have become monstrous! Down with genital imperialism! All flesh can come!” (32). As a sort of Dr. Frankenstein, F. designs for Edith a “pan-orgasmic body” free from genital imperialism, but he tries as well to change the narrator's body by imposing on him the Charles Axis' bodybuilding system. However, F's projects fail: Edith is unable to reach the orgasm without the aid of technology, and 'I' remains trapped in his “miserable body”, since his ambition is too vast for the Charles Axis method:

> -You're breaking my back!
> -You wanted to be the Superman who was never Clark Kent. You wanted to live at the front of the comic. You wanted to be Ibis the Invincible who never lost his Ibistick. You wanted SOCK! POW! SLAM! UGG! OOF! YULP! written in the air between you and all the world. To become a New Man in

> just fifteen minutes a day meant absolutely nothing to you. Confess!
> -The pain! The pain! Yes, yes, I confess. I wanted miracles! I didn't want to climb to success on a ladder of coupons! I wanted to wake up suddenly with X-ray Vision! I confess! (116).

On the other hand, F. fails in his political career too; he is apparently a successful politician and hero of the French cause, but in the letter he addresses to the narrator, the *Québecois* is no longer sure of his commitment to revolution and his political ideas. He appears instead as a politician 'crazy' for fame and in constant need of an audience: "Yes, I long to be President of the new Republic. I love to hear the armed teen-agers chant my name outside the hospital gates. Long live the Revolution! Let me be President for my last thirty days" (153). His sufferings are not the ones of the narrator's, he regrets instead his lack of purity: "I suffer from the Virgo disease: nothing I did was pure enough. I was never sure whether I wanted disciples or partisans. I was never sure whether I wanted Parliament or a hermitage" (162). Indeed, he feels jealous of the narrator:

> Times I felt depleted: you with all that torment, me with nothing but a System (…) I was jealous of the terrors I constructed for you but could not tremble before myself. I was never drunk enough, never poor enough, never rich enough. All this hurts, perhaps it hurts enough" (152-153).

F's jealousy makes him aware of his limitations, he is too much dependent on his necessity and greed for power. Economic and political power is not enough for him, F. needs as well to exert personal power over 'I' and Edith. This personal realm is configured by the friendship and sexual activities of the three protagonists. As mentioned above, the relationship of F. and Edith is prior to the narrator's marriage, it was F. who changed Edith's body and made of her the ideal wife for 'I'. Edith and F. are lovers without the narrator's awareness, they both experience the 'Telephone Dance' in the lobby of the *System Theatre*, they shoot themselves with holy water form

Tekawitha's stream, and they travel to Argentine “for a little sun and experiments” (Cohen 2001: 164). In Argentina, they participate in an orgy with Hitler disguised as a waiter, who bathes them with 'human' soap; they perform again the 'Telephone Dance -this time with their nipples instead of with their fingers-, they consume pornographic literature, and they end relying on a Danish Vibrator to fulfil their needs.

On the other hand, F's relationship with 'I' is fully as sexual as the one with Edith; they are both friends and lovers. The most explicit episode of their affair is the drive to Ottawa, when they start to masturbate together while driving to the Parliament. 'I' is full of desire, but on the other hand he is afraid of F's driving: “As his cupped hand bobbed faster the needle tickled ninety-eight. How I was torn between the fear for my safety and the hunger to jam my head between his knees and the dashboard!” (92). The narrator declares his unconditional love and admiration for F.: “Let's stop the car. F., I love you, I love your power. Teach me everything” (91). However, 'I's' tendency to rationality prevents him of reaching the sexual climax, since he fears the silk wall that F. previously placed on the road to teach him a lesson. Homoerotic desire is explicitly described in this episode, but there are other allusions throughout the novel. For example, F. gives the narrator the aforementioned phrase book as a present, which was given to the *Québécois* for “an oral favor ... performed for a restaurateur friend” (71). Furthermore, F's description of his 'Professional Greek Chair' suggests all kind of sexual and torture practices:

> I had access to a Professional Greek Chair. I had the straps and stirrups to blitz your knob into a veritable sledgehammer, mouthful for a pelican. I had a Sphincter Kit that worked off the tap like washing machines and bosom aggrandizers. Had you a notion of my Yoga? (160).

The connection between Greek culture and homosexuality is reinforced with an allusion to Keats, the English romantic poet 'par excellence' that Canada longs for in *The Favourite Game* (1963): “Canadians are desperate for

a Keats" (Cohen 2003: 109). In *Beautiful Losers*, F. writes in his letter addressed to the narrator: "Mary and I, we slip into the orgy of vase Greeks and restaurant Greeks" (212). The Greek vase that Keats carefully described in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in order to discuss the relationship between art and humanity is replaced in modern Montreal by Greek restaurants, where F. performs 'oral favors' and receives presents from restaurateurs. The seriousness of Keats' work of art is transformed into what Söderlind calls 'the orgy of life': "One of the objectives of the self-reflexive quest of the novel is to let the 'vase Greeks' step out of the frozen artwork into the orgy of life, or to allow the feature to escape from the enclosure of the temple of entrainment and face the pain of reality" (*Margin/Alias* 1991: 47).

Nevertheless, homosexuality in *Beautiful Losers* is celebrated, but only as "a way of reinforcing heterosexuality" (Martin 1977: 29). The male protagonist displaces his love for F. to the female characters of the novel: on one hand, 'I' fantasizes about sex with the saint Catherine Tekawitha, he wants to get under her "rosy blanket", and he declares himself in love with her, "I fell in love with a religious picture of you" (3). But this desire cannot be possibly fulfilled and remains as a spiritual quest. On the other hand, Edith is the narrator's wife and the cause of some of his frustrations. After her dead, F. confesses to the narrator his sexual adventures with her, which made him jealous: "How quickly pettiness returns, and that most ignoble form of real estate, the possessive occupation and tyranny over two square inches of human flesh, the wife's cunt" (13). Furthermore, the narrator feels guilty about Edith's suicide, since she wanted indeed to "teach him a lesson" with her death:

> She was going to teach me a lesson, my old wife. You and your fictional victims, she used to say. Her life had become gray by imperceptible degrees, for I swear, that very night, probably at the exact moment when she was squeezing into the shaft" (7).

I's memories about Edith are diverse: "I looked up from the lemming

research and closes my eyes, remembering her as young and bright, the sun dancing in her hair as she sucked me off in a canoe on Lake Orford" (7). The narrator's language becomes blurry when he recalls his sexual practices with her and complains about the loneliness in which she left him: "Edith Edith Edith Edith in your sweet skin envelope Edith Edith Edith thy lonely husband Edith thy lonely husband thy lonely husband thy apples thy run thy creases thy dark lonely husband" (67). The narrator recalls as well the afternoon in which Edith surprised him all painted with red grease -maybe to recover her old 'red' Indian self- and invited him to become 'someone else': "She was waiting for me all covered in red grease and I was thinking of my white shirt" (45). However, the narrator refused her proposal and asked her to get dressed instead.

The symbology of the red and white colour in this episode is repeated throughout all the novel to illustrate the conflict between the 'Red' and 'White' man: Catherine becomes white after her dead, "The face of Catherine Tekawitha had turned white! (…) And in a moment she became so beautiful and so white . . ." (210). But in another episode, she spills a glass of wine at a French dinner party, "the red stain spreads over the white table cloth, the guests, and even 'drifts of spring snow darkened into shades of spilled wine, and the moon itself absorbed the imperial hue'" (Hutcheon, 1974: 44). The narrator links this episode with the apocalyptic, the 'Red' self intrudes into the French party and Catherine actually apologizes for the incident: "I guess I owe you all an apology" (98). The image stands as a symbol of Catherine's conversion: it categorizes the pretensions of the imperial France and equates by intertextuality, -Revelation 6:12 of the Bible- the wine with blood in the Eucharistic transformation.

An episode at the beginning of *Beautiful Losers* tries to reunite the 'White' and 'Red' self with the painting of a miniature of the Akropolis with a red nail polish called 'Tibetan desire' -apparently two contradictory terms since the Buddhist ideal demands a desireless state of mind-. F. paints the miniature in red to approach 'the other':

-That's the way it must have looked to them, some early morning

when they looked up at it.
-The ancient Athenians, I whispered.
-No, F. said, the old Indians, the Red Men (13).

Nevertheless, he introduces with his painting the duality of the sacred and the profane, since the reproduction of the Greek monument is perverted twice as a plaster object of consumption for tourists and as a canvas for F's red nail polish. But this chromatic transformation of the Akropolis that subverts the sacramental motif of the ancient Greek tradition, it is as well a "transfusion of blood": "White to viscous red, one column after another, a transfusion of blood into the powdery ruined fingers of the little monument" (12). This 'red' transfusion invites 'the other' to see "the akropolis rose!", which for F. is possibly by "going down a saint": "Do you know how to see the akropolis like the Indians did who never even had one? Fuck a saint" (12). The expression "the akropolis rose" is hence equivalent to 'fucking' or 'going down' the saint; a saint which in *Beautiful Losers* in none other than the Indian Tekawitha.

The bond between the Greek and Indian tradition is emphasized, then, not only in Isis and her corresponding Indian homologous -Edith and Catherine Tekawitha-, but in the parallelisms that F. builds around the Phartenon. The Greek monument involves an interest in 'the other' and "echoes F's caution to see the differences in all roses which are lost in naming" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias,* 1991: 55). It is a reunion of languages, races, as well as of the sacred and the profane.

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In this reunion, sexuality plays an important role in *Beautiful Losers,* it is not only confined to the protagonists triangle but to other communal forms: in the seventeenth century Indian tribes practised 'Fuck cures', mask dances, and arranged the marriages of the youth; whereas in Modern Montreal the

sex invades the streets, so "Good fucks (…) have migrated from marble English banks to revolutionary cafés. There is love on Rue Ste. Catherine, patroness of spinsters" (186). Furthermore, the gears of political demonstrations are sexual:

> We began our rhythmical movements which corresponded to the very breathing of the mob, which was our family and the incubator of our desire (…), and I knew that all of us, not just the girl and me, all of us were going to come together" (120-121).

This passage corresponds to the aforementioned episode of the Parc Lafontaine rally in which F. and 'I' became accidentally involved; what matters are not the exhortations of the speaker against the English Canadians, but "the crowd's sense of shared and anonymous sexual excitement" (Davey 1999: 12). In this regard, the episode anticipates postcolonial psychology that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari inaugurated with their work *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972). In this book, both philosophers question the relationship of desire to the particular reality of a capitalist system. They construct a critique of the repressed sexuality, but announce at the same time the exploitation that capitalism makes of this desire. In their work, Deleuze and Guattari introduced as well the notion of 'deterritorialization', a concept based on Deleuze's philosophy that was later applied to different fields of knowledge such as anthropology, so its original meaning was extended into new forms that satisfied Deleuze and Guattari's intention of encouraging an extended usage of their concepts. In fact, 'deterritorialization' acquires a variance in meaning throughout the *Anti-Oedipus*, but broadly refers to how human subjectivity becomes fluid and dissipated in a contemporary capitalist society. Then, the 'deterritorialization' represents the escape from a rigidly set of relations that impose discrete categories of meanings and identities into a virtual actualization of them by means of multiplicity and fluctuating identities.

'Deterritorialization' is present in *Beautiful Losers* by means of the body; in

this sense, Cohen gives all kind of details about the physicality of the protagonists and their bodily functions: the narrator's constipation, Edith's belly button as a sacred vessel, Mary Voolnd's lubrications, etc. This insistence is reaffirmed by F's plans, who wants to free the body from 'genital imperialism', i.e. to 'deterritorialize' it from all restrictions so the body may reach the so-called 'Body without Organs', a concept coined again by Deleuze in his work *The Logic of Sense* (1969) that represents the implementation of new channels and combinations into the corporal realm that allow the individual to satisfy her or his desire. In Davey's view:

> The novel's deterritorialization of the body, through the assumption that "All parts of the body are erotogenic" (27-28), that "All flesh can come" (32), leads ultimately to the deterritorialization of the nation-state and the would-be nation-state. The tribe of "New Jews" that F. dreams of joining, along with I. and Edith, "dissolves history and ritual by accepting unconditionally the complete package.... [The New Jew] travels without passports..." (1999: 12).

The above quotation suggests how the liberation of the body might carry as well the escape from History that the protagonists seek. In this deterritorialized body and nation-state, the figure of the 'New Jew' "dissolves history" and emerges as the leader of the tribe. Therefore, at the end of the novel, the old man has perhaps turned into what F. calls "The New Jew" that inhabits in the new Canada. According to F., the New Jew is a beautiful loser who plays favourite games and "loses his mind gracefully", just as he describes in the following lines:

> He applies finance to abstraction resulting in successful messianic politics, colorful showers of meteorites and other symbolic weather. He has induced amnesia by a repetitious study of history, his very forgetfulness caressed by facts which he accepts with visible enthusiasm. He changes for a thousand years the value of stigma, causing men of all nations to pursue it as superior sexual talisman. The New Jew is the founder of Magic Canada, Magic French

> Québec, and Magic America. He demonstrates that yearning brings surprises. He uses regret as a bulwark of originality (...) Sometimes he is Jewish but always he is American (161).

With these lines, F. introduces in an ironic way the betrayal of the Jewish kindness to the *Québecois*, while he declares at the same time that it is the wandering Jewish victim the one that founds nations due to a messianic sense of history. Therefore, the concept of the "New Jew" represents another kind of duality in the novel: one side the Jew is called to found nations and restore the magic to the contemporary society, but on the other hand the Jew is the convenient amnesic who turns his back to the Canadian French.

In this New Canada, politics and sexuality are freed from rigid categories; they both meet with desire. This desire is described by Deleuze and Guattari as a positive process of production that produces reality, it is actually "a machine, and the object of desire is another machine connected to it" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 28). Canada becomes a universe of 'desiring-machines', all of which are connected to one another. Sexuality transcends the male and female gender roles in order to embrace a multiplicity of flows created by a "hundred thousand" desiring-machines: "making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand (…) We always make love with worlds" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 325).

I's words in the rally of Parc Lafontaine are hence not surprising: "(...) and I knew that all of us, not just the girl and me, all of us were going to come together" (121). The encounter with the woman in the demonstration is anonymous, it suppresses the individual ego and enhances the political expression of desire. In this regard, 'I' becomes part of the "Montréal's desire apparatus", but this bonding with the group is immediately destroyed when someone in the crowd recognizes him: "He looks English! -He looks Jewish (…) -This man is a sex pervert! (156). For Söderlind, "'I's auto-erotic command, 'Fuck the English' becomes literalized, as it were, and 'fucking the English' is suggested as the cure to the political ill" (*Margin/Alias* 1991: 46).

This political ill finds its most cruel expression in the rape of Edith at the age of thirteen. The narrator's wife, an Indian orphan raised in French

Quebec, was attacked by four Frenchmen because of her different origin: her "freakishly long nipples" (…) had inflamed the root of the whole town" (59), had made

> every single person... secretly obsessed with this nipple information. The Mass is undermined with nipple dream: I believe that in some way the village delegated these four men to pursue Edith into the forest. Get Edith! commanded the Collective Will. Get her magic nipples off Our Mind!" (60).

However, Edith was raised as a French Catholic and behaves as one of them when she cries for help: "Help me, Mother Mary!" (60); she urinates at the moment of the rape and her captors become impotent when they recognize Edith as part of their community: they "could not bear to learn that Edith was no longer Other, that she was, indeed, Sister" (61). But this recognition reinforces them in their endeavour to rape her, then they use tools associated with the Indian symbology, "index fingers, pipe stems, ball-point pens, and twigs" (61), as weapons to attack her. To a certain extent, they want to ensure that Edith remains 'other', but this endeavour is useless since as Söderlind points out:

> the desire to turn the Other into the same must fail since its success would ensure that she can no longer be subjected. Conversely, the colonized must struggle to remain other in order not to be assimilated and hence figuratively devoured" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 2001: 45).

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In both episodes described above, the dissolution of the ego leads to destruction and to the entrapment in "the machinery of the mundane world" (Söderlind, *Margin/Alias* 2001: 54). But in response to this machinery

exists the so-called “eternal machinery of the sky” manifested in various episodes of the novel with Catherine's death, the sky-writing of Charles Axis, and the final transformation of the old man into a Ray Charles' movie. This machinery harmoniously connects the universe into a “necklace of incomparable beauty and unmeaning” (Cohen 2001: 17); however, it is the mundane machinery the one that governs modern Canada, and again, the “fucking of the saint” and its apocalyptic consequences become the means to disarticulate it.

In modern Canada, mechanics and technology become more and more important. Bodies are mechanized: “Has the machine turned the food brown?” (6), cities sweep the nature of old Quebec, and F. and the narrator masturbate “in what is now downtown but was once the woods” (53). Sexuality as well is reduced to a set of mechanical routine techniques, as Scobie collects:

> I remembers his evenings with F. as “happy views of simple human clockwork” (13), Catherine Tekawitha sees sexuality as an “assault of human machinery” (44), but it is an “assault” only because she does not see it in a proper context; F. listens to the “tiny swamp machinery” (165) of Edith's cunt; Mary Voolnd buzzes in sexual surprise like a pinball machine, and F's only regret is that she is not (yet) as eternal as a machine (191); even the “teen-age male prostitutes” are given a kind of dignity, as ultimate losers “at the very bottom of Montréal's desire apparatus” (237)” (1978: 119-120).

The maxim expression of the mechanization of sexuality is found in the episode of the Danish Vibrator, the electronic sexual toy replaces human contact in the Argentinian hotel. Once the machine is plugged, it learns to feed itself and ends taking control of the situation assaulting both Edith and F.; but once the machine feels satisfied, “it hurls itself out of the window, descends onto the beach and into the huge rolling sea” (180). This dehumanizing episode that ends reducing Edith to a “buffet of juice, flesh, excrement, muscle to serve its appetite” (179) contrasts with the reunion that

both Edith and F. experiment in the System Theatre with the *Telephone Dance*, a rewarding sexual and spiritual experience narrated by F.: "I *became* a telephone. Edith was the electrical conversation that went through me" (33). In this dance, the individual egos of the participants are dissolved into the mechanization and transcendence of the "ordinary eternal machinery", which is the same machine that Catherine perceives when dying, or the one that the old man, -IF-, manages to reach when he becomes the movie projector.

Other methods to connect with this "ordinary eternal machinery" occur when the protagonists of the novel listen to the numerous songs that Cohen introduces. In this regard, songs, like movies or the rest of popular expressions emerge as the engine of desire: "Love cannot be hoarded (…) Desire changes the world!" (5). This emotion is described in the Marvin Gaye's song episode, or better known as 'Gavin Gate' in *Beautiful Losers*. In this passage, 'I' turns the radio in his basement and listens to Gaye's pop song: "It hurt me too", then it follows a transcription of the song in the form of a theatre piece where the protagonists are the singer, the female backing vocalists, and the instruments. As Lebold wrote, "all changes in rhythm in the song or musical incident (a guitar veil, a drum break) are presented as dramatic events in the play whose basic subject is rock 'n' roll intensity and emotion" (2003: 172). This emotion and intensity described in the form of a theatrical piece that includes echoes of a subverted religion by sexuality -since the protagonists "whip themselves with electric braids" (76)- is the same that F feels when listening "ceaselessly" to the Rolling Stones, or the one that the narrator acknowledges about folk songs: "I wanted to live in a folk song like Joe Hill" (20). Furthermore, the epigraph of the novel opens with 'Ol' Man River' from Ray Charles asking to "lift that bale" (veil), an action finally accomplished with the old man turning into the Ray Charles' movie. Songs become, thus, in *Beautiful Losers* a means of escaping from the reality and history that oppresses the protagonists. They are "a gate to eternity" (Lebold 2003: 172).

To a certain extent, *Beautiful Losers* captures Cohen's end as a novelist and announces his new dedication as composer and performer of songs. The same spring of 1966 in which the novel was published, he began the

recording of his first album *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, published one year later with success. Just as the characters of the novel propose, Cohen abandons the written and intellectual nature of the novel for the orality and emotion of the song; he decided, then, to embrace Magic and to become a legend in the world of popular music.

4.4. *Beautiful Losers*: A Recapitulation

Beautiful Losers is a novel about Canada and its history: the text goes back and forth in time in order to present a land of victors and victims in accordance with the Canadian psyche that identifies itself with victims (Atwood 1972). In this regard, the protagonist of *Beautiful Losers* is a victim that needs to be a victim, just as the rest of the characters of the novel are to some extent victims too. The protagonist 'I' shares with the Canadian ethos a 'garrison mentality' that oppresses him in the form of History, a burden and a system that the narrator's best friend, F., tries to destroy with a training method designed to escape from systems and embrace magic.

In addition to the narrator's personal story in the contemporary Quebec, the novel displays a political discourse about Canada and its history that comprises the French invasions and the influence of contemporary American culture. Through the character of the virgin Catherine Tekawitha, the reader gets to know First Nation's tribes in Canada and the Jesuits colonization in the seventeenth century, a process that included imperialistic practices such as changing proper names and converting natives into the Catholic faith. However, the British managed throughout the years to gain control over the French and impose their language and traditions until the construction of the modern Quebec, where the protagonist trio -the narrator, his wife Edith, and F.- lives.

The novel captures the vibe of the Montreal of the sixties and the prevailing tensions among First Nations, French, and English; in this sense, F. is a French Canadian and revolutionary that blows the statue of Queen Victoria, Edith is a native from the same tribe of Catherine Tekawitha raped by Frenchmen, and the narrator is an English speaking Jew harassed by a

crowd of *Québecois*. The narrator blames institutions like the Catholic church to whom he accuses of being responsible for these tensions, as well as he points out to the Church's inability to confront sexuality and conceal the sense of frustration that prevails in modern Canada. Nevertheless, the Church is not the sole responsible for Canada's problems; in this sense, the culture of the US menaces to sweep the Canadian identity with Hollywood movies and new saints like Marilyn Monroe. Furthermore, the tone of the novel becomes 'carnivalesque' (Bakhtin 1965), then popular expressions that come from America like comic books and pop songs turn into high art, whereas the Canadian poetry written in high style sounds ridicule. In this sense, Cohen is interested in "the material bodily lower stratum" (Bakhtin 1984: 23) that returns sexuality and corporal realities back to the core of literature.

Cohen inaugurated with *Beautiful Losers* the Canadian Postmodern, a new narrative tradition based on the philosophical ideas of postmodernism and the works of authors like Samuel Beckett, Alexander Trocchi, and William S. Burroughs. Nevertheless, the specificities of the Canadian nation offer a new understanding of the tradition, in which the duality of a society "caught between two worlds" (Hutcheon 1991: 81) challenges the notions of centre and margin; in this sense, irony, paradox, and satire become the perfect means to approach the postcolonial experience of a 'commonwealth' literature. Another important concept in the Canadian Postmodern is 'Historiographic Metafiction', which alludes to the fiction based on historical events, but at the same time it openly reflects on the act of writing and the nature of fiction, such as the narrator of *Beautiful Losers* continuously remarks, "O Reader, do you know that a man is writing this? A man like you" (Cohen 2001: 102). Furthermore, the reader plays an important role in the construction of meaning in the novel -he needs to suspend his logic and accept the indeterminacies of the work of art- since the 'implied contract' between writer and reader has been destroyed.

The indeterminacy of the novel makes the narration complex and difficult to understand; the book is divided into three parts narrated by different voices -the narrator's diary, F's letter, and the epilogue in the third person-. The narrative is not linear and the plot is confusing and barely relevant, it is

instead the expansion of the character's situations what matters. Intertextuality plays an important role in this expansion, since it provides materials based on different traditions such as Jesuit chronicles, Indian legends, and comic books that allow Cohen to construct his own hagiography. Furthermore, the novel does not only employ textual references but other media from the sixties such as the radio, cinema, advertisements, etc., that contribute to construct a collage glued by the drive of desire.

Desire is restricted by the English language -an insufficient means to express emotion-; on the contrary, Iroquois emerges as the language of emotion and the ideal vehicle to express the hidden meanings of "all talking men". First nations rely on oral language to transmit knowledge and traditions, whereas in modern Canada prevails the written mode of the prayer book that F. gives to the narrator; a book in which there are two columns in Greek and its English translation that illustrate the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane that the sociologist Émile Durkhem coined in order to distinguish transcendence from mundanity. The book illustrates as well the problems of communication that Catherine Tekawitha suffers in different situations, which ultimately end in the silence of a prayer. Furthermore, the written words of the prayer book along with Cohen's use of capital letters remind the reader of the visual aspect of a novel constructed both from the oral -the language of the tribe and new media as the radio- and the aforementioned visual. This division brings to the front McLuhan's ideas about the written and oral nature of language; in this sense, the 'old' language -the one of modern Canada- is close to the print form since it relies on the individual; whereas the 'new' language relies on the community and the tribe.

It is precisely the 'new' language the one that the author associates with the feminine sound "hiss" that contrasts with the masculine 'shhh' that silences the group. Therefore, the 'new' language needs to incorporate the feminine principle to the masculine one, so they both converge in the expression of desire. The feminine principle is embodied in Isis, the Egyptian goddess that represents all the feminine characters in the novel who bring comfort to the world, such as Edith, Catherine Tekawitha, and Mary Voolnd.

It is by lifting the veil of Isis that the protagonist will find the path to sainthood and the reader will manage to understand the text. Furthermore, the lifting of the veil is already announced in the epigraph of the novel with a Ray Charles' song that changes the word 'veil' for the 'bale'.

It is in the third part of the novel when the old man of the epilogue visits the Stem Theatre and turns into a movie of Ray Charles that invades the sky of Montreal; the protagonist manages, thus, to transcend reality and reach sainthood. Nevertheless, the narrator has previously learnt to forget about individual consciousness and embrace collective emotion by means of F.'s trainings. F. wants to return magic back to mundane reality, however, he fails since oppression still persists in the extremes of religious fervour and the exploration of sexuality, from which Catherine Tekawitha and Edith respectively die. On the other hand, F. ends defeated and confined in a psychiatric. It is there when the *Québecois* recognizes that his discipline -the narrator- has transcended his teachings and he is ready to find the balance of the saints; the narrator is the only one, then, ready to 'lift the veil'. The love and sexual triangle among the protagonists is broken and the old man of the epilogue emerges as the convergence of the sacred and the profane.

Sexuality plays a protagonist role in *Beautiful Losers;* it is not only a personal but a political and social issue that connects Cohen's novel with the work of the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, who describe desire as a positive process of production that produces reality. In this sense, Canada becomes a universe of "desiring machines" that frees individuals from rigid categories. However, sexuality finds its most cruel expression in the episode of Edith's rape, a colonial practice in the form of sexual aggression. On the other hand, sexuality becomes mechanized in the novel with experiences such as "The Telephone Dance", "The Danish Vibrator", and "the ordinary eternal machinery", all of them intense moments that connect protagonists, just like songs do, with the promise of sainthood.

CHAPTER V:

Songs of Leonard Cohen and *Songs from a Room*: A New Direction in Cohen's Career

The chapter features Cohen's first studio albums *Songs of Leonard Cohen (*1967) and *Songs from a Room* (1969) as a continuation of the Canadian artist's career. Nonetheless, the new means of expression in the form of songs change the treatment of Cohen's old themes, which sound milder in his records. The first section -The Sound of Cohen's World- analyses Cohen's first record, where the romantic and 'dark' romantic side of the artist prevails with loving relationships and dynamics of power and control. On the other hand, section two deals with Cohen's second album *Songs from a Room,* where it emerges a more social 'I' in connection with the context of war and violence that North America was witnessing at the end of the sixties with the Vietnam war and the tensions with Russia in the Cold War. Finally, section three offers a summary of the main ideas of the chapter.

5.1. The Sound of Cohen's World

Leonard Cohen became a notorious songwriter with his first record *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967), a work that supposed a turning point in Cohen's career, who moved from the world of letters to the multitudinous audiences of rock stars. Thanks to media and publicity his works -poetry, fiction and music- began to sell in unimaginable quantities. Cohen had succeeded in becoming the popular poet he always dreamt of: "I always had the idea of

poetry for many people (…) I never wanted to be in the world of letters. I wanted to be in the market-place on a different level. I suppose I always wanted to be a pop singer" (as cited in Woodcock 1976: 151). Indeed, he materialized with his first record the idea that music and poetry were inseparable, "Music was always the closest to me, and I saw poetry as part of that. My early poetry was much influenced by Scottish border ballads, the Spanish flamenco songs, the Portuguese fado" (as cited in Chaffin 1983: 9). In this sense, it is not surprising that Cohen ultimately turned into a folk singer in an age where figures like Bob Dylan had already succeed in challenging the limits of pop lyrics, as the *New York Times* illustrated in 1968 with photographs of Leonard and Dylan to debate whether pop lyrics should be considered 'poetry' or not.

However, Cohen's literary circle in Canada mistrusted about his move into the public arena, for his mentor Louis Dudek in the article "The Prophet as Celebrity" of the *McGill Reporter,* January 20, 1967:

> In the resulting confusion, popular entertainers are claimed to be artists of serious value, like the Beatles or Bob Dylan. And genuine artists of promise descend perforce to mere entertainment and become idols or celebrities, like Leonard Cohen, who was a fine poet before he 'gave all that up' to take the guitar (as cited in Gnarowsky 1976: 8).

Other critics like Ondaatje considered that "our interest in Cohen makes the final judgement, not the quality of the writing", both Cohen and Dylan were for him "public artists", who could "be cynical about their egos or pop sainthood while at the same time continuing to build it up. They can con the media men who are their loudspeakers, yet keep their integrity and appear sincere to their audiences" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 195). In this regard, Cohen preserved form his early works the integrity and sincerity, then, the fact of becoming a public figure should not discredit his success as songwriter.

Numbers speak clear: *Songs of Leonard Cohen* was in the top twenty in the

UK and Cohen had made two appearances on the BBC to perform his songs in the radio show *Top Gear,* hosted by the notorious British DJ John Peel. Furthermore, he was beginning to capture the attention of U.S audiences, who had not welcomed his record so enthusiastically in comparison with Europe. Leonard had reached success with a work that almost did not come out due to Cohen's disagreement with the arrangements of his producers. In this sense, John Hammond -the producer of Dylan's early recordings- signed Cohen for the label Columbia and began to produce his record in May 1967; however, Cohen did not feel at ease in the recording sessions and was not satisfied with Hammond's arrangements, whom according to the Canadian songwriter were too Spartan; then, the producer was changed in October 1967 to John Simon, a twenty-six year-old who had gained success with his recordings of Simon and Garfunkel. They worked intensively on Cohen's songs, but still the Canadian songwriter was not content with the arrangements; he considered this time that Simon overproduced his songs with unnecessary instruments, so at the end Simon left the record without doing the final mix. It was Cohen, then, the one who finished it with the help of the studio engineer Warrant Vincent and some hired musicians from the band 'Kaleidoscope'. At that time Cohen's record was probably the most expensive that Columbia had ever produced.

At the end *Songs of Leonard Cohen* was released on 26 December 1967. The album's front sleeve showed a sepia-toned head shot of a thirty-three year old grave man; it was an uncommon age for becoming a pop star. The back cover showed the drawing of a woman in flames -a Mexican saint that symbolized some of Cohen's old themes-. The record featured ten songs that captured Cohen's world -masters and slaves, lovers, sexual and spiritual longing, war, romanticism and humour, etc.- all familiar subjects for Cohen's readers. Nevertheless, the treatment of these topics seemed now gentler in comparison with his fiction and poetry, or at least not so ferocious, as Breavman claims in *The Favourite Game:* "The news is sad but it's in a song so it's not so bad" (Cohen 2011: 102).

The record displays a nude sound that foregrounds Cohen's voice, as well as includes different arrangements that wrap the songs and contribute to create the hypnotic atmosphere of the album. While Cohen's voice has a very

limited tonal range, it sounds very expressive due to the Canadian artist's sense for inflections; furthermore, the pace is slow and the words are deep, so Cohen's originality in the rock scene of the sixties was guaranteed, as Sylvie Simmons wrote, "Then, Leonard's album was like nothing of its time – or of any time, really. Its songs sounded both fresh and ancient, sung with the authority of a man used to being listened to, which he was" (2012: 183). In this sense, Buffy Sainte-Marie wrote a very positive review of Cohen's songs in the magazine *Sing Out!* in the September 1967 issue:

> Cohen's songs are both other-worldly and incredibly "mortal"...as I find Cohen himself to be. Most of his melodies are not immediately "catchy" but they are, you'll find, after hearing him, amazingly sophisticated to a much more extended form than Anglo-Saxon folk and pop music employs. With the exception of "Suzanne," the musical figures inevitably take a long time to repeat themselves as they do in some kinds of Indian and American Indian music. So it is that a casual listener might miss these patterns. I'm sure that Cohen will be criticized for this. He'll be called vague, aimless, cloudy. But I, for one, am grateful to him for lifting me off the familiar musical ground. It's curious to start off in one key and then find yourself in another, and to have no idea how you got there. It's like losing track of time; or realizing you've outgrown your name; or getting off at Times Square and walking into the Bronx Zoo; you don't know how it happened or who is wrong, but there you are (2014).

Cohen's songs had, thus, something magical that moved audiences. Its confessional tone dragged listeners into an intimate and sensual atmosphere, "escuchar este disco era como hacer entrar a Cohen en la habitación"[1] (Vassal 1978: 90). A perfect example of this magic comes with the first song of the record "Suzanne", one of the most famous and covered songs from Cohen. As Simmons wrote:

1 To listen to this record was like letting Cohen enter into the bedroom.

> 'Suzanne' is a weightless, mysterious song. The great songs, the ones that keep drawing us back again and again, are mysteries. We go to them not for familiarity and solace -although there is solace in 'Suzanne' – but for what is unknown, for something that's hidden in them which continues to haunt us and make us seekers" (2012: 125).

The character of 'Suzanne' was inspired by the dancer Suzanne Verdal, a young woman married to the sculptor Armand Vaillancourt, one of Cohen's friends in the artistic scene of Montreal. Cohen fell in love with Suzanne but nothing happened between them due to Suzanne's marriage with Vaillancourt. Nonetheless, Cohen bumped one day into Suzanne in the streets of Montreal, she invited him to her place near the river, and she served him Constant Comment tea (Simmons 2012: 125); Cohen wrote in return his notorious song.

"Suzanne" starts with Cohen's voice and a simple guitar pattern, but later the Canadian artist introduces a chorus of female background voices and occasional string arrangements that contribute to create the 'saintly' sound that drags audiences into mystery. Nevertheless, the mystery of the song not only relies in the sound but in the lyrics, since "Suzanne" is not only a love song, it includes instead Cohen's interest in the relationships between saints and disciplines.

In this regard, "Suzanne" casts the role of the saint, whereas the pronoun 'you' refers to the role of the discipline who seeks an experience. This experience, as Scobie wrote, probably involves "a reality which is in some ways darker and more uncertain than 'normal' life" (1978: 135). Then, when "Suzanne takes you down" (Cohen 2009) , there is exoticism, "And she feeds you tea and oranges that came all the way from China" (2009); marginality, "She's wearing rags and feathers from Salvation Army counters" (2009); uncertainty, "And you know that she's half crazy and that's why you want to be there" (2009); as well as a learning process, "And she shows you where to look amid the garbage and the flowers" (2009). All these features remind the listener of Cohen's old characters who wanted to achieve sainthood by means of a training, such as 'I' attends F's lessons in *Beautiful Losers*, the

pronoun 'you' of the song finds the same path by means of Suzanne's teachings, who is already a 'Beautiful Loser' that lives by the river.

Suzanne's place by the river features the important role that water plays in the song: "Suzanne takes you down to her place by the river / You can hear the boats go by, you can spend the night forever" (2009). In this sense, when the discipline doubts whether to undertake the experience, "And just when you want to tell her that you have no love to give her" (2009), he finds himself already trapped in Suzanne's wavelength, "She gets you on her wavelength and she lets the river answer / That you've always been her lover" (2009). Furthermore, in the second strophe Cohen parallels Suzanne's character with the figure of Jesus, who walked upon the water:

> And Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water
> And he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower
> And when he knew for certain only drowning men could see him
> He said all men shall be sailors then until the sea shall free them
> But he himself was broken long before the sky would open
> Forsaken almost human he sank beneath your wisdom like a stone (2009).

Water is, then, a recurrent symbol in the song that probably highlights the flowing condition of nature, while at the same time provides a mystic and biblical scenario for the song. In fact, in the third strophe Suzanne becomes "our lady of harbour", which according to Scobie, "the phrase recalls the titles of the Virgin Mary; 'harbour' not only presents that area of a port city which is most broken and desperate but also forms the culmination of all the images of 'shelter'" (1978: 136). Suzanne comforts, thus, the discipline in her role of universal mother; her wisdom parallels the one of Jesus and the chorus of the song announces the perfection of Suzanne, Jesus, and the discipline by a simple game of changing pronouns: "For you've touched her perfect body with your mind (…) For he's touched your perfect body with His mind (…) For she's touched your perfect body with her mind" (2009). The unit among these three entities symbolizes perfection, but it is a unity

among the marginal heroes, the 'beautiful losers'. In this regard, even Jesus is broken:

> And when he knew for certain
> Only drowning men could see Him
> He said, "All men will be sailors, then,
> Until the sea shall free them".
>
> But He Himself was broken
> Long before the sky would open
> Forsaken, almost human
> He sank beneath your wisdom like a stone (2009).

Despite the fact that Suzanne's portrait in the song is very positive -she is a free, unique, romantic, bohemian and original human being-; she belongs, just as Jesus, to the marginal ones. In Scobie's words: "the grace of Suzanne and Jesus stems not from their power but from their powerlessness" (1978: 135). Therefore, the song enhances the virtues of the marginal and 'beautiful losers', who are the ones truly capable of overcoming pain and loneliness, so they teach the rest "(...) where to look / Among the garbage and the flowers" (2009).

The next song of the album -"The Master Song"- introduces a different perspective of love in the record. If "Suzanne" transmits luminosity and calmness, this track contains a dark, violent and ambiguous kind of love. Furthermore, whereas "Suzanne" captures a sort of 'celestial' sound, "The Master Song" sounds 'earthly' with a bass line and wind arrangements that provide a cold atmosphere. The song describes a triangle of lovers engaged -as the title suggests- in a master/slave relationship. The speaker of the song is the prisoner, who addresses to the 'you' that keeps him enslaved, but at the same time this 'you' has a master, "a numberless man in a chair / Who had just come back from the war" (2009). The speaker envies the master, who takes the discipline:

(…) in his airplane
Which he flew without any hands
And you cruised above the ribbons of rain
That drove the crowd from the stands
Then he killed the lights in a lonely lane
And, an ape with angel glands
Erased the final wisps of pain
With the music of rubber bands (2009).

On the other hand, the discipline reminds the listener of Edith's despair in *Beautiful Losers*,

Your eyes are wild and your knuckles are red
And you're speaking far too low
(...) And your thighs are a ruin, you want too much (2009).

The discipline seeks, thus, new experiences that allow her or him to overcome pain, so she or he searches in sexuality and religion -there are numerous religious symbols such as the bread, the wine, and some temple- a solace. The song continues with a set of images that describe the instructing process that the master executes over the discipline, but in the last strophes roles are reversed and the prisoner becomes the teacher of the master:

I loved your master perfectly
I taught him all that he knew
He was starving in some deep mystery
like a man who is sure what is true.
And I sent you to him with my guarantee
I could teach him something new,
And I thought him how you would long for me
no matter what he said no matter what you'd do (2009).

As Scobie wrote, “All the positions are neatly changed round: the master becomes the pupil, the pupil becomes the prisoner, the prisoner becomes the master” (1978: 132). Therefore, the last part of the song changes the meaning of the song and the prisoner becomes victorious: “And now do you come back to bring / your prisoner wine and bread?” (2009). Love is, then, a cruel and violent game where the three parts of the triangle seek to gain personal power over the rest. It is, thus, a very different interpretation of love what Cohen does in “The Master Song” in comparison with “Suzanne”.

“Winter Lady” combines a gentle and warm guitar accompaniment with a soft melodic line sang by Cohen. There are synthesizers, harps, and some wind arrangements that contribute to create the aforementioned gentle atmosphere. In the song, the speaker asks for the kindness of a stranger -the Winter Lady- to whom he begs to stay with him for a while. He tells her about one of her former lovers, “(...) a child of snow” that resembled the 'Winter Lady':

> She used to wear her hair like you
> except when she was sleeping,
> and then she'd waved it on a loom
> of smoke and gold and breathing (2009).

This beautiful image of the lover who wakes up and her hair looks like a “(…) loom / of smoke and gold and breathing” (2009) contrasts with the coldness of the lyrics in the song, in which there is a “Winter Lady”, a “child of snow” and “nights grew colder”. In fact, the “Winter Lady” is a traveller on her way to the station, so their encounter, as well as the rest of the words of the song suggest the separation between the two strangers. Therefore, the speaker presumably is left alone and the lady continues her journey in a song that paradoxically sounds gentle and cheerful due to its arrangements and soft melody.

“The Stranger Song” provides a contrast with the music of “Winter Lady”, since it is an intense and dark piece without arrangements. The song stands,

thus, with a raw sound provided by Cohen's guitar and voice. The lyrics present the figure of the 'dealer', "who is reaching for the sky just to surrender" (2009); his business is presumably the world of feelings and emotions, so he addresses to the woman that gives him shelter and accounts her what dealers sought in the past, "He was just some Joseph looking for a manger" (2009). They prefer to renounce to the warmth and shelter that the woman offers to them in order to travel and seek new experiences, so they insist: "I told you when I came I was stranger" (2009). Nevertheless, the speaker of the song is a dealer too, but he seems now tired of travelling and asks her for shelter:

> (…) But now it's rusted from the elbows to the finger
> And he wants to trade the game he plays for shelter
> Yes he wants to trade the game he knows for shelter
>
> Ah you hate to see another tired man
> Lay down his hand
> Like he was giving up the holy game of poker
> And while he talks his dreams to sleep
> You notice there's a highway (2009).

However, the woman mistrusts the stranger and she doubts whether to offer him shelter or not; roles seem reversed and she turns into the stranger, "It's you my love, you who are the stranger" (2009), but at the end she accepts to meet with him "upon the shore, beneath the bridge" (2009). The last two strophes repeat the first part of the song, so roles are reversed again and the woman finds that the dealer has tricked her again. The song captures, thus, the tensions and power dynamics between lovers.

The music of "Sisters of Mercy" is gentle: the tune is agreeable and the guitar arrangements transmit a warm atmosphere. The song includes percussion, mandolin, accordion, and other instruments such as cymbals and bells that provide a festive feel that contrasts with the gravity of the former song. There is, indeed, a lot of instruments in the production and the

rhythm almost reminds to a waltz; in this regard, the song seems overproduced in comparison with the rest of the record. The lyrics describe a traveller in despair, "When you are not feeling holy, your loneliness says that you've sinned" (2009), but he finds the comfort in the Sisters of Mercy to whom he confesses his guilt. They offer him consolation, "They touched both my eyes and I touched the dew on their hem" (2009), so the speaker offers them in return his best compliments in his song: "If your life is a leaf that the seasons tear off and condemn / they will bind you with love that is graceful and green as a stem" (2009). Furthermore, he insists on the purity of their encounter in the last three verses:

> And you won't make me jealous if I hear that they sweetened your night:
> We weren't lovers like that and it would still be alright
> We weren't lovers like that and it would still be alright (2009).

The next song -"So Long Marianne"- continues with the celebratory tone of "Sisters of Mercy", so it includes different arrangements with percussion, strings, harp, female chorus, and guitar. Nevertheless, it combines parts of raw sound -where Cohen sings just with his guitar-, along with others that display all kinds of arrangements. The mood of the song is, thus, of celebration, but it contains as well a slight sensation of melancholy and sadness. This sensation comes from the sense of the lyrics, which echo the sentiment of parting in the chorus:

> Now so long, Marianne
> It's time that we began
> To laugh and cry and cry and laugh
> About it all again (2009).

The lyrics describe a travelling man with no home, "I used to think I was

some kind of Gypsy boy" (2009), but the speaker finds one day his lover and returns back. It is a clear, beautiful, and simple lyric that describes a gentle love; but this love has lasted too much in time, so the artist forgets his creative duties, just as Breavman does beside Shell in *The Favourite Game*:

> Well you know that I love to live with you
> But you make me forget so very much
> I forget to pray for the angels
> And then the angels forget to pray for us (2009).

Furthermore, the speaker feels trapped by the gentle love that he receives from the woman he lives with, "I'm standing on a ledge and your fine spider web / Is fastening my ankle to a stone". He accounts how they met and they felt in love in the desperation of youth:

> We met when we were almost young
> Deep in the green lilac park
> You held on to me like I was a crucifix
> As we went kneeling through the dark (2009).

Despite the tenderness and fondness that the speaker uses to address himself to his lover, the chorus of the song and the last strophe indicate the inevitable separation of the lovers, who make their way in different directions. Just as the music suggests with its celebratory but melancholic tone,

> It's time that we began
> To laugh and cry and cry and laugh
> About it all again (2009).

The next song “Hey, that's no way to say goodbye” deals again with the theme of separation; it has a cosy sound based on a simple guitar line in thirds with the vocals, some string arrangements, and female backward voices. The lyrics display classical romantic images -“your hair upon the pillow like a sleepy golden storm” (2009)- of a love story that has come to an end: “your eyes are soft with sorrow / hey, that's no way to say goodbye” (2009). Nevertheless, the song acknowledges the difficulty of saying goodbye to a beloved lover, so the illusion of connection between them still persists despite the separation: “I'm not looking for another as I wander in my time, / walk me to the corner, our steps will always rhyme” (2009). The speaker explains her lover how time changes love, “it's just the way it changes, like the shoreline and the sea” (2009), but they both have shared an experience that has made them feel unique, despite “yes, many loved before us, I know that we are not new” (2009).

“Stories of the Street” changes the mood of the record into an intense and dark piece that reminds the listener of Spanish folklore. Cohen's voice cracks at certain moments and sounds effortful, the guitar accompaniment displays an intense music, and synthesizers help to build a dark and mysterious atmosphere for the song. The lyrics describe a world turned into pieces: war must come, cities are broke, and men are gone.

> I know you've heard it's over now and war must surely come,
> The cities they are broke in half and the middle men are gone
> But let me ask you one more time, O children of the dusk,
> All these hunters who are shrieking now oh do they speak for us? (2009).

Cohen introduces, thus, with “Stories of the Street” a broken and corrupted social background that contrasts with the more intimate character of the rest of the songs in the record. The lyrics of the song display all kinds of allusions to a world of war, “Why are the armies marching still that were coming home to me?” (2009), careless sex, “The age of lust is giving birth,

and both the parents ask / the nurse to tell them fairy tales on both sides of the glass" (2009), and the solitude that inhabitants of a big city experiment, "and lost among the subway crowds I try to catch your eye" (2009). The speaker finds, then, trapped into a world of stories of the street:

> The stories of the street are mine, the Spanish voices laugh.
> The Cadillacs go creeping now through the night and the poison gas,
> and I lean from my window sill in this old hotel I chose,
> yes one hand on my suicide, one hand on the rose (2009).

The Spanish voices, Cadillacs, and hotel rooms provide the context in which the speaker collects his stories of the street, which they move always between extremes:

> "yes one hand on my suicide, one hand on the rose
> (…) "You are locked into your suffering and your pleasures are the seal"
> (…) "and one eye filled with blueprints, one eye filled with night" (2009).

The speaker seeks, thus, a refuge far away from the city streets, where he might find balance. He guards the romantic idea of escaping from civilization and living in a farm with his beloved, where life is cosy and warm in contrast with the streets, "O come with me my little one, we will find that farm / and grow us grass and apples there and keep all the animals warm" (2009). Nevertheless, life in the country is not the solution that the speaker is looking for; the speaker's desperation does not stop there: "And if by chance I wake at night and I ask you who I am, / O take me to the slaughterhouse, I will wait there with the lamb" (2009). Therefore, he seems trapped in those streets that display an eternal world of extremes:

With one hand on the hexagram and one hand on the girl
I balance on a wishing well that all men call the world.
We are so small between the stars, so large against the sky,
and lost among the subway crowds I try to catch your eye (2009).

The next song "Teachers" transmits a depressive mood; Cohen's voice sounds harsh, as if he was worried, and the guitar accompaniment repeats the same basic chord pattern throughout all the song. Despite the abrasive tone of the piece, the guitar sounds beautiful and nostalgic. Furthermore, there is a guitar arrangement that reminds of the distant Hindu folklore, so the song sounds exotic too. The speaker of the song seeks for "a teacher of the heart", a key concept and goal in the song that symbolizes the total control of emotions. The speaker meets a woman with dark hair and another woman with blonde hair, but both of them reject him as discipline. Later he meets a wise man, but he is not able to follow him, so at the end he finds himself disoriented in a hospital where "morning came and then came moon" (2009). The atmosphere of the hospital is depressive and numb,

(...) none was sick and none was well
when at night the nurses left
I could not walk at all (2009).

He realizes that the girls of the hospital cannot help him to master his heart, so at the end he "ate and ate and ate":

I spent my hatred everyplace,
on every work on every face,
someone gave me wishes
and I wished for an embrace (2009).

The speaker obtains from men and women the embraces he wishes for, but he still lacks the perfect passion that a handsome singer like him expects to find. Despite "we teach old hearts to rest" (2009), the feeling of frustration remains at the end of the song, since the speaker's lessons are undone. He realizes, thus, that he cannot reach eternity by means of passionate love; just as the music suggests, there is no ending for his quest:

> Oh teachers are my lessons done?
> I cannot do another one.
> They laughed and laughed and said, Well child,
> are your lessons done?
> are your lessons done?
> are your lessons done? (2009).

The last song of the record "One of Us Cannot be Wrong" was inspired by the German singer-songwriter Nico, a collaborator of Lou Reed's 'The Velvet Underground' with whom Cohen fell in love during the times he lived in the Chelsea Hotel. On one occasion that Nico rejected Cohen, the Canadian songwriter accounts how he went back to his room, "I married these two wax candles, and I married the smoke of two cones of sandalwood and I did many bizarre and occult practices that resulted in nothing at all, except an enduring friendship" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 155). In this regard, the song captures the same practices of black magic employed to seduce a woman, but the tone of the piece is humorist rather than serious:

> I lit a thin green candle, to make you jealous of me.
> But the room just filled up with mosquitos,
> they heard that my body was free.
> Then I took the dust of a long sleepless night
> and I put it in your little shoe.
> And then I confess that I tortured the dress
> that you wore for the world to look through (2009).

The speaker appears to be desperate for the love of the woman: he calls the doctor, he asks a saintly teacher for advise, and he pities the misfortune of an Eskimo that happened to meet her. At the end of the song, he launches his final plea: "But you stand there so nice, in your blizzard of ice, / oh please let me come into the storm" (2009). This plea is musically accompanied by the disparate shoutings of the singer, as well as by whistles and the sound of a flute. It is an unexpected ending that highlights the humour of the piece and turns the love desperation into something comic. Therefore, at the end the poet is able to laugh at himself and make fun of his drama.

5.2. The Sound of the Sixties

Songs from a Room was Cohen's second album studio released in 1969. Although the record seems not to differ in style and themes from his previous work *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, there are several differences between both records, as Vassal wrote, "De hecho, *Songs from a* Room es a *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, lo que *Flowers for Hitler* es a *The spice-box of Earth*"[2] (1978: 89). In this regard, Cohen's old concerns for personal relationships go to the bottom in this new album in order to show a stronger political dimension in the lyrics; in fact, the Vietnam war had a relevant presence in the media at that time, then Cohen's new direction with the record was probably influenced by the political events of the late 1960's: there were no masters or saints in his songs anymore, but rather losers close to the experience of death, suicide, war and history, political fighting, drugs, and the conflicts of individual freedom. As Lebold suggests, "le disque opère un recentrage temporaire sur une question précise : que faire de l'indéracinable désir de liberté logé en nous dans un monde où le mot lui-même («liberté») na plus de sens?"[3] (2013: Chapter 6, Section 4, para. 3).

2 In fact, *Songs from a Room* is to *Songs of Leonard Cohen* what *Flowers for Hitler* was to *The Spice-Box of Earth.*

3 The album operates as a temporal refocus over an accurate question: what is to be done of the

But not only the themes of the record change but the form of the songs, which were shorter in length and with a rawer treatment of the arrangements. If *Songs of Leonard Cohen* did almost not come to light due to disagreements in the production of the songs, the record *Songs from a Room* was smoothly recorded in Nashville under the direction of the producer Bob Johnston, who managed to capture Cohen's preference for a Spartan production. Therefore, the sound of this new record is much less ornamented and spare, as Cohen recognized, "A lot of my friends who were musical purists had castigated me for the lushness and overproduction of my first record", said Leonard, "and I think that got to me somewhere and I was determined to do a very simple album. It's very stark" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 206).

Reviews were not positive despite Cohen's confidence in the record; for example, Alec Dubro wrote in the US edition of *Rolling Stone:*

> In 'Story of Isaac', he is matter of fact to the point of being dull. When he's not being matter of fact, but rather obscure, as he is in 'A Bunch of Lonesome Heroes', he's just irritating. Other singer-poets are obscure, but generally the feeling comes through that an attempt is being made to reach to a heart of meaning. But Cohen sings with such lack of energy that it's pretty easy to conclude that if he's not going to get worked up about it, why should we (as cited in Simmons 2012: 207).

Other critics like William Kloman from The *New York Times* admired Cohen's performance as story-teller but disliked the production of the songs, "Cohen's new songs are short on beauty" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 207). Nevertheless, reviews in Europe were positive and the record achieved a greater success than his predecessor *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, since it made it to number two in the UK charts, twelve in Canada, and sixty-three in the US.

The album's front sleeve showed a picture of Leonard Cohen in black and white; the photograph was just as austere as the arrangements of the songs were, whereas the back cover showed Marianne in the home that she and

ineradicable desire for freedom on a world where the world itself (freedom) has no more sense?.

Cohen shared in Hydra. The record begins with “Bird on the Wire”, a piece that reminds of the old country songs that Cohen used to listen in his childhood, in fact, Johnny Cash -one of the greatest country figures in the US- would cover this song years later. The song begins with a tone of confession in which Cohen's voice sounds monotonous but sincere; it is a sober piece with elegant guitar arrangements, discreet synthesizers, and an Egyptian harp from the Yiddish tradition. The lyrics gather the speaker's confession, who begins admitting his guilt:

> Oh, like a baby, stillborn
> Like a beast with his horn
> I have torn everyone who reached out for me (2009).

In this regard, the speaker recognizes disappointing people who surrounded and loved him, so he could reach freedom. He tries to justify himself,

> Like a bird on the wire
> Like a drunk in a midnight choir
> I have tried in my way to be free (2009).

However, all the images of the song transmit loneliness and desperation -from “a worm in a hook” to a “knight from some old fashioned book” (2009)-. Nevertheless, the piece transmits a desire of change towards a more positive ending in which the speaker finds redemption by means of his song,

> But I swear by this song
> And by all that I have done wrong
> I will make it all up to thee (2009).

In order to achieve this goal, he needs to learn to find balance between opposites:

> I saw a beggar leaning on his wooden crutch
> He said to me, "You must not ask for so much"
> And a pretty woman leaning in her darkened door
> She cried to me, "Hey, why not ask for more?" (2009).

The last strophe repeats the confession of the first part of the song, so as Scobie suggests, "and for all its loneliness and confession, 'Bird on a Wire' *is* a love song; the final repetition of 'I have tried in my way to be free' is firm and hopeful" (1978: 142).

The next song "Story of Isaac" adopts a classic guitar pattern that reminds of the Spanish folklore; it adds as well a very simple arrangement with the synthesizer. It is a narrative song with an important biblical background, just as Bob Dylan did on *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965), Cohen narrates the story of Abraham, who commanded by God intended to sacrifice his son Isaac. Nevertheless, Cohen turns this biblical text into a protest about violence and war in both the ancient and modern world. Furthermore, the Canadian artist's use of detail, the intensity of the Biblical tale, and the autobiographical component of the child who loses his father at the age of nine-years old make the song very vivid. The lyrics start accounting the early part of Isaac's story from the point of view of the child who lives under the authority of his father. The description is very vivid and progressively shows "the gradual falling away of the normal social world as father and son approach the isolation of the sacrificial mountaintop" (Scobie 1978: 138). There are signs that announce the fatal destiny of death:

> I was running, he was walking,
> and his axe was made of gold.

(…) Thought I saw an eagle,
but it might have been a vulture,
I never could decide.
Then my father built an altar,
he looked once behind his shoulder,
he knew I could not hide (2009).

Nevertheless, the song's account becomes interrupted in the climax and the speaker addresses himself to the audience:

You who build these altars now
To sacrifice these children
You must not do it any more (2009).

In this sense, the tone of the song becomes didactic; the speaker argues how Isaac's story was inspired by faith instead of by greed, then the protagonist "(…) father's hand was trembling / with the beauty of the world" (2009). Furthermore, God stopped Abraham's hand and rewarded him with Grace.

However, "a scheme is not a vision" (2009), so the children and soldiers are brought instead to death by a vicious system, by those that "never have been tempted / by a demon or a god", and own "hatchets blunt and bloody" (2009). In the last strophe, the speaker sides with the soldiers, who are not aggressive victors but victims of a cruel system that dictates them indiscriminately who are brothers and who are enemies:

And if you call me brother now,
forgive me if I inquire,
"Just according to whose plan?"
When it all comes down to dust
I will kill you if I must,

I will help you if I can.
When it all comes down to dust
I will help you if I must,
I will kill you if I can (2009).

Furthermore, the speaker asks in the last three verses for mercy,

And mercy on our uniform,
man of peace or man of war
the peacock spreads his fan (2009).

But this 'fan' is presumably dead, thus, the song highlights again the critique of war practices where soldiers are not the victors, but the first victims instead.

“A Bunch of Lonesome Heroes” starts with a traditional accompaniment in guitar chords and simple arrangements with synthesizers that reach in the chorus a more complex sound with drums and an electric guitar. The lyrics of the song deal again with the figure of the soldier, then the 'lonesome heroes' are presumably soldiers who “were smoking out along the open road” (2009), but they are isolated from each other since “the night was very thick and dark between them”; so each man has to carry with “his ordinary load”. Among this man appears a soldier who wishes to tell his story:

“I'd like to tell my story,"
said one of them so young and bold,
"I'd like to tell my story,
before I turn into gold” (2009).

The soldier feels, thus, the necessity to distance himself from “the bunch”; he is “young” and “bold”, and he wants to express himself and tell his own

story before “turning into gold”, an expression that reminds the reader of Cohen's poem “The Cuckold's Song” and probably alludes to the transitiveness of life. The soldier behaves, then, as a sort of artist who needs to communicate his truth. Nevertheless, nobody listens to him, “no-one could really hear him”, since the night is “so dark and thick and green” (2009). Therefore, he ends singing for those who do not need him:

> I sing this for the crickets
> I sing this for the army
> I sing this for your children
> And for all who do not need me (2009).

The song ends with the repetition of the lines in which the soldier asks for attention, so he can tell someone his story, but presumably he will not get an audience. Then, the feeling of loneliness and isolation becomes stronger along with a touch of irony addressed to the concept of heroism in the war, since the soldiers of the song are “a bunch of lonesome heroes” that feel nothing else than pain and despair.

The next piece -”The Partisan”- is another war song in the record that deals with the figure of the soldier, but the song was not composed by Cohen but by Anna Marly, who wrote it in London in 1943 with the original title “La Complainte du Partisan”. The song originally written in French is about the French Resistance in World War II; in Cohen's version, “it presents a resistance fighter in an unspecified war, fighting a guerilla action against an invading army” (Scobie 1978: 139). The figure of the soldier reminds again of Cohen's 'losers':

> I have changed my name so often,
> I've lost my wife and children
> (…) There were three of us this morning
> I'm the only one this evening
> but I must go on;

the frontiers are my prison (2009).

In this regard, the soldier seems to accept stoically a destiny that condemns him to loneliness and pain; however, there is room for hope in the last strophe of the song:

Oh, the wind, the wind is blowing,
through the graves the wind is blowing,
freedom soon will come;
then we'll come from the shadows (2009).

Nevertheless, as Scobie suggests, "Cohen's voice remains subdued, resigned to fate; (…) the song treats this with sympathy but no false hope. It is a lament, not a revolutionary call to arms" (1978: 139). This lament is musically expressed not only by Cohen's grave tone, but by the intense and beautiful guitar pattern, the wind arrangements, and the female background voices that beautifully sing the refrain of the song in French:

Les Allemands étaient chez moi,
ils me dirent, "Signe toi,"
mais je n'ai pas peur;
j'ai repris mon arme.

J'ai changé' cent fois de nom,
j'ai perdu femme et enfants
mais j'ai tant d'amis;
j'ai la France entière (2009).

The next song of the record -"Seems so long ago, Nancy"- abandons the war theme in order to narrate the story of Nancy, a young woman who

committed suicide with “A forty-five beside her head / An open telephone” (2009). It is a very personal and intimate song that wants to render homage to the figure of Nancy, a friend of Cohen in real life who appears in the song as a sort of saint that brings love and comfort to the rest, “I think she fell in love for us / In nineteen sixty-one” (2009). She is associated with love, “Nancy wore green stockings / and she slept with everyone” (2009), but also with death, “none of us would meet her / in the House of mystery” (2009). In this regard, “the House of Mystery” probably represents her death, the drama that separate her from her new-born child and brought her to the radical action of suicide. In the song, there is as well a 'House of Honesty' identified with Nancy's father, a judge “on trial”, but it is in Nancy's House of Mystery where the speaker can join her in the last strophe and render his homage to her:

> In the hollow of the night
> when you are cold and numb
> you hear her talking freely then,
> she's happy that you've come,
> she's happy that you've come (2009).

Despite her suicide, Nancy's love still remains; the song is, thus, not only a mournful elegy but a beautiful tribute to Nancy. As Scobie wrote:

> In the same way as 'Suzanne' unites and renews all the themes of the first album, 'Nancy' is the culmination of the second. All its desperate and lonely characters are comforted by her; all its misery and destruction are joined in her death, and yet the song can still end with the word 'happy'. It is a song in which Cohen extends the full force of his love and compassion; as such, it (and the whole album) seem to me to offer the deepest and most humane vision in the whole of Cohen's work. The love in this song is the guarantee that Cohen will indeed not betray those who venture with him into the furnace (1978: 144).

The music of the song confirms Scobie's personal opinion with a slow and beautiful guitar pattern that allows Cohen to sing the elegy in a calm tone; furthermore, there is a remote string arrangement that sounds clearer at the end of the song.

In "The Old Revolution" the speaker admits his guilt in the destruction of the world, "Now let me say I myself give the order / To sweep and to search and to destroy" (2009). He feels responsible for the power dynamics that make soldiers victims of a corrupted system:

> Even damnation is poisoned with rainbows,
> all the brave young men
> they're waiting now to see a signal
> which some killer will be lighting for pay (2009).

He presents himself in the past as a soldier too, but now he is disenchanted and feels part of the cruelty and nastiness of the social world:

> I fought in the old revolution
> on the side of the ghost and the King.
> Of course I was very young
> and I thought that we were winning;
> I can't pretend I still feel very much like singing
> as they carry the bodies away (2009).

Therefore, the song does not explore suffering from a personal perspective as Cohen does in many of his earlier works, but from a more general point of view in which the social dynamics of the world are strongly criticized by the use of images of war and revolution. Furthermore, the speaker asks his audience to venture into a metaphor of death, "Into this furnace I ask you

now to venture / you whom I cannot betray" (2009). This furnace represents the culmination of the painful social order; in this regard, there is no other solution than destruction, since all individuals contribute to this corruption. As Scobie wrote, "He does not stand back from the furnace; he is part of it too" (1978: 137). In the last strophe the poet launches a proposal for those "who are broken by power" to join him in the furnace; so they can share the burden of the social collapse:

> Yes, you who are broken by power,
> you who are absent all day,
> you who are kings for the sake of your children's story,
> the hand of your beggar is burdened down with money,
> the hand of your lover is clay.
> Into this furnace I ask you now to venture
> you whom I cannot betray (2009).

The suffering in the song is, thus, not individual but rather collective. Cohen uses a simple pattern of guitar chords and a few discreet arrangements with organ and Jew's harp to show how all individuals participate in the destruction of the world. The next song "The Butcher" shares with "The Old Revolution" the same feeling of self-responsibility towards the social order. The song begins with a butcher slaughtering a lamb, the speaker of the song witnesses the scene and accuses the butcher, but the old man replies,

> Listen to me child,
> I am what I am
> and you, you are my only son (2009).

In the next strophe, the speaker seeks an escape from the cruelty of the social world in the form of drugs:

Well, I found a silver needle,
I put it into my arm.
It did some good,
did some harm (2009).

But drugs are only a temporary solution and pain returns again with the "long" and "cold" nights. In the next strophe, the speaker bitterly wonders about "some flowers growing up / Where the lamb fell down"; it is not enough relieve, so he turns to his Lord who answers him,

Listen, listen to me now
I go round and round
and you, you are my only child (2009).

The last strophe presents a plea for help that ends in the last verse of the song with the encouraging but harsh "lead on my son, it is your world" (2009). In this sense, the world might be a place of suffering and pain where it is difficult to stand, but it is the only place to be. Then, all individuals become again accomplices to some extent of the cruelty and harshness of the social order, since they actively participate in it. This feeling is musically expressed by an acoustic blues that barely has any arrangement, however, it is a very expressive song due to changes in modulation and tone.

The last three songs of the record go back to Cohen's earlier preference for personal relationships and leave aside the social context that impregnates the rest of the album. "You Know Who I am" describes a difficult loving relationship:

I cannot follow you, my love,
you cannot follow me.

I am the distance you put between
all of the moments that we will be (2009).

The next lines refer to the speaker's nature, who “loves changing from nothing to one” (2009); the addressee of the song knows about the poet's travelling spirit, as the title of the song suggest, “You know who I am” (2009); then, she or he should not expect him to remain beside her or him. Nevertheless, the speaker makes demands on her or him that show his loving dependence and contradictory feelings about her or him:

Sometimes I need you naked,
sometimes I need you wild,
I need you to carry my children in
and I need you to kill a child (2009).

The speaker recognizes in the next strophe that he would remain beside her or him if she or he asked him to, “I will surrender there”, but at the end of the song he realizes again about the distance between them, which seems insurmountable in a loving relationship already wounded and hopeless.

“Midnight Lady” is a more positive tune that has a slight country sound with a bass line that reminds of Johnny Cash's songs, as well as a cricket Jew's harp. Despite the lyrics of the song start in despair, “she scorned me and she told me / I was dead and I could never return” (2009); at the end the speaker manages to seduce the lady of the song in a victorious last strophe:

So I walked through the morning, sweet early morning,
I could hear my lady calling,
"You've won me, you've won me, my lord,
You've won me, you've won me, my lord,
Yes, you've won me, you've won me, my lord,
Ah, you've won me, you've won me, my lord,

Ah, you've won me, you've won me, my lord" (2009).

On the other hand, the song that closes the record "Tonight will be Fine" is a happy and playful tune. The melody is simple and popular; the sound is traditional and the arrangements are done with instruments such as the Jewish Harp, the flute, and the human whistle at the end of the piece. The lyrics, however, are not so positive since they reflect on the departing of the beloved: "Sometimes I find I get to thinking of the past / We swore to each other then that our love would surely last" (2009). The speaker finds himself alone in bare rooms:

I choose the rooms that I live in with care,
the windows are small and the walls almost bare,
there's only one bed and there's only one prayer;
I listen all night for your step on the stair (2009).

Nevertheless, he still possesses fine memories that help him to go on, "If I've got to remember that's a fine memory" (2009), so the drama is not as poignant as in other Cohen's songs. It is, thus, a consolation in the form of a hum that downplays the uncertainty of being alone. If *Songs of Leonard Cohen* ended with a satirical desperate cry for help, *Songs from a Room* holds its breath in a daily humming.

5.3. *Songs of Leonard Cohen* and *Songs from a Room*: A Recapitulation

Cohen made a change of direction in his career with the publication of his first album *Songs of Leonard Cohen*; he crossed the Canadian frontiers and managed to capture the attention of the European and North American audiences. Despite problems and disagreements with producers, Cohen's record was finally released on December 1967. The album featured ten songs

that gathered Cohen's personal world of masters and slaves, romanticism, irony, violence, etc. The record had an intimate character due to Cohen's lyrics and the elegant production of the songs that highlighted Cohen's voice over the rest of instruments.

"Suzanne" is the opening track and one of the most popular songs in the world of pop, it approaches the figure of the 'Beautiful Loser' with the character of 'Suzanne', a fascinating woman that lives by the river. She embodies the figure of the saint -she is compared with Jesus- that teaches her discipline "where to look / among the garbage and the flowers" (Cohen 2009). In addition, the song is surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery that has fascinated audiences over the years due to Cohen's melody, the lyrics, the symbology of water, the female chorus, etc. Nevertheless, the record contains as well tracks that explore darker aspects of love, such as the triangle of "The Master Song", in which each member seeks to obtain power over the rest. Other songs like "Winter Lady" deal with the separation of two strangers, whereas for example in "The Stranger Song", Cohen reflects on how lovers are, indeed, strangers that play games. Songs like "Sisters of Mercy" and "So Long Marianne" sound cheerful; they describe, in fact, a gentle kind of love; however, "So Long Marianne" is a song of parting, just as the following track "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye" describes the difficulty of saying goodbye to the beloved one. The gentle tone of the aforementioned tracks is suddenly interrupted by "Stories of the Street", a song that changes the mood of the record with a description of a world turned into pieces; in this regard, the social content of this song contrasts with the rests of the tracks of the album and it announces Cohen's change into a more committed social 'I' in *Songs from a Room.* The last two songs of the album return back to Cohen's old themes with "Teachers" and "One of Us Cannot Be Wrong"; in this last track, the singer addresses cries of love to the woman that ignores him, but it ultimately prevails humour and irony in the singer's desperation.

The Vietnam War and the continuous presence of politics in the media at the end of the sixties probably influenced the lyrics of *Songs from a Room,* an album that abandoned Cohen's personal world in order to explore themes such as social violence, drugs, war, political tensions, etc. Furthermore,

Cohen did not only change the themes but the form of the songs too, since the arrangements were rawer and the tracks were shorter in length.

The record begins with a confession in “Bird on a Wire”, a song that reminds listeners of old country songs; the speaker admits his guilt and expresses his desire to change and reach redemption. In the next song “Story of Isaac”, Cohen transforms a biblical account into a protest against violence in the ancient and modern world; it is a very vivid song, indeed, that impacts the listener with images of death. Other songs like “A Bunch of Lonesome Heroes” and “The Partisan” explore the figure of the soldier, who locked in his solitude is ultimately a victim instead of a victor. With “Seems So Long, Nancy”, the album abandons the war imagery but not the world of victims, since the protagonist -a young woman- ends committing suicide victim of the cruel society that surrounds her; it is a moving song that captured the attention of audiences such as “Suzanne” in Cohen's former album did. Cohen resumes the theme of the defeated soldier in “The Old Revolution”, where he presents a cruel and nasty world; the same world of “The Butcher”, a song that describes how everyone is responsible to some extent of the everyday violence on the streets. The last three songs of the record resume Cohen's personal world and deal again with the tensions of romantic relationships in “You Know Who I am”, “Midnight Lady”, and the closing piece “Tonight Will Be Fine”, a happy and playful tune that faces the departing of the beloved with a “fine memory”.

CONCLUSIONS

Most of Cohen's obsessions -art, sexuality, and love- are build around control and power dynamics that foster unequal relationships among the participants of poems, novels, and songs; in this sense, the reader and listener of the Canadian writer's *oeuvre* encounters a world of masters and slaves that frames the artist's different identities and desires that have been analysed throughout this dissertation.

Despite Cohen's interest in exploring throughout all his works the identity of the artist and the scope of the creative work, what the Montreal artist ultimately acknowledges are the tensions and conflicts present in human nature, so in the famous poem "A Kite is a Victim" from *The Spice-Box of Earth*, the different entities -falcon, kite, poem, and fish- represent the frustrations and ambitions of the human heart. In this regard, art and creation appear as a prolongation of the artist's longing for personal power, who seeks fulfilment in the field of love and sexuality; furthermore, the artist in Cohen's works frequently views creation as a means to gain power over the personal realm, as well as he obtains inspiration from the lovers he abandons. Therefore, Cohen's artist seeks to take over "the unconditional leadership of the world" (Lumsden 1976: 72) by means of love and sexuality instead of artistic creation.

The tradition that Cohen chooses to approach the field of love and sexuality is the 'Black Romantic' that writers like Genet, Rimbaud, or the *Beatniks* in the 1950's and 1960's explored in their works. The focus is set,

then, on the darker, most marginal and radical aspects of romantic and sexual relationships, so it is not surprising to find strange sexual practices in *Beautiful Losers* and a preference for the violent and the exotic in Cohen's poems and songs. Furthermore, the 'Black Romantic' tradition fits perfectly in the Canadian artist's world of masters and slaves, since domination becomes a fundamental component in the personal relationships that the poet describes in his works. However, Cohen's treatment of love and sexuality is not always as harsh as the 'Black Romantic' tradition suggests, there are indeed several tender odes and narrative passages addressed to lovers that challenge the aforementioned approach. In this sense, sexuality is not only in Cohen's work an oppressive force but a promising path towards sainthood and sanity, just as the figure of the 'Beautiful Loser' suggests, who "loses his mind gracefully" (Cohen 2001: 161) in favourite games. The 'Beautiful Loser' or 'The New Saint' symbolizes a new dimension of sexuality in which the sexual activity becomes a necessary step to reach sainthood; it is what Cohen calls the 'religion of the flesh', in which sexuality acquires spiritual and healing connotations by means of the use of a religious vocabulary.

However, a darker vision prevails at the end with the radical and marginal behaviours of Cohen's characters, since some of them ultimately die of "too much dirty sex" (Cohen 2001: 4) and are unable to find, thus, a proper balance. In this regard, the constant focus on sexuality fosters obsessions around the corporal body and the concept of physical beauty; therefore, trivial values in the Judeo-Christian tradition such as a sexual allure and a pleasant appearance become decisive and very important in Cohen's literary universe. The Canadian artist reverses, then, aesthetics and former moral values in order to set physical presence at the core of his work; then, the protagonist triangle of *Beautiful Losers* worries and seriously suffers for their appearance, just as Breavman and Shell do in *The Favourite Game,* or Mary and the Collector do in "The New Step" from *Flowers for Hitler.*

Nevertheless, the real losers in Cohen's particular universe of master and slaves are the female characters, who are frequently subordinated to the male protagonists and do not possess a complex and rich psychology, just as it happens with 'Shell' and the rest of women in *The Favourite Game,* who are

merely objects of consumption for the artist that help him to expand his art. Then, the women that the poet loves and later abandons in pursuit of his art become often Cohen's primordial object of poetry. In this sense, collections like *The Spice-Box of Earth* and *Flowers for Hitler* contain several poems that present a narcissistic speaker who finds himself trapped in the dilemma of remaining comfortably with a lover or undertaking an endless artistic journey to learn how to love alone, in which of course, this latter becomes often the poet's final resolution. However, Cohen's sexism in his works is challenged by beautiful and brave portraits of women, such as the ones of the songs of "Suzanne" and "Seems so Long Ago, Nancy" in his studio albums *Songs of Leonard Cohen* and *Songs from a Room*, where two caring women face life with different consequences.

In addition, many of Cohen's songs and poems display a sexual ambiguity that questions the aforementioned sexism. Cohen plays often with personal pronouns and does not reveal the gender of the lover to whom the speaker addresses his verses, in fact, there are few occasions in his poetry in which the speaker refers clearly to a women as his lover. The poet prefers, then, to explore triangular relationships and play with the notion of ambiguity; for example, the Canadian writer portrays an homosexual relationship in *Beautiful Losers* between the narrator and his best friend F., as well as a romantic triangle between them and Edith, the narrator's wife. Cohen's reinforces, then, the ambiguous world of lovers, in which gender seems to be an irrelevant question subordinated to the 'religion of the flesh'.

However, the flesh ages and carries scars, so the poet's plans of conquering the world by means of love and sex vanish with the knowledge of mortality; thus, the artist seeks a refuge in art in order to face and fight against time and decay, so he can preserve the memories that matter to him. While the world of romance and feelings is fragile and temporary, art on the contrary provides for the poet a secure shelter where he can turn romance into artistic inspiration. Therefore, art and loving relationships are for the artist two different worlds build on each other: since the creator cannot conquer the field of romantic relationships, he decides instead to translate his pains, anxieties, frustrations, etc., into an artistic work that ultimately reigns over the transitiveness of life.

But Cohen's "unconditional leadership of the world" (Lumsden 1976: 72) does not end in the realm of personal relationships; on the contrary, the poet extends his ambitions in works like *Flowers for Hitler, Beautiful Losers,* and *Songs from a Room* to the fields of politics and history. In this regard, the character of F. represents the paradigm of the man who not only ambitions a sexual and personal power but a political one as well. Cohen introduces in *Beautiful Losers*, thus, a strong presence of the social and historical context that shape the politics of the sixties in Montreal, just as he uses in *Flower for Hitler* the terrible event of the Holocaust as a metaphor of the evil that governs the world, or he sings anti-war pieces in *Songs from a Room*. Therefore, the Canadian writer opts for a new social 'I' after works like *The Favourite Game, The Spice-Box of Earth,* and *Songs of Leonard Cohen,* which possess a much more intimate character.

Cohen's treatment of the political realm is often satirical, such as he does in poems like "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns his Thoughts" or "Business as Usual", where the poet ironically deals with the Canadian politics of the time. The use of satire coincides with Cohen's shift to what critics call the Canadian Postmodern, a movement that starts in the 1960's and attempts to create a sensitivity that affirms the Canadian identity by means of new narrative modes instead of literary themes. Among these modes stands the use of irony, a resource of 'Commonwealth literatures' that signals the double discourse of history and politics; therefore, Cohen uses irony and satire to show the premises and contradictions under which the nation of Canada has been constructed, specially in works like *Flowers for Hitler* and *Beautiful Losers*.

An important entity that conditions Cohen's view of the world and his identity is his Jewish inheritance; he often uses traditional symbols of his religion, such as the Spice-Box that represents the redolence of the Jewish Sabbath and gives title to one of his poetry volumes. Cohen's work has, then, plenty of nods to the Jewish tradition that the poet adapts to express his inner world, such as he does with the 'Baal Shem's' butterfly that certifies with its death the end of creativity in "After the Sabbath Prayers", or he uses the Jewish freilach dance in "Last Dance at the Four Penny" to announce Cohen's flight from the Jewish tradition into the world of pop.

The constant use of traditional and religious symbols in the Canadian artist's work becomes reinforced by the influence of the Jewish and Montreal poets Irving Layton and A.M Klein, to whom Cohen addresses several poems in his different collections and recognizes them as his friends and mentors. But whereas Irving Layton is Cohen's companion and artistic accomplice, A.M Klein represents for the Montreal poet the figure of the wise teacher that ends his days tragically silenced by a mental illness. In this sense, A.M Klein is the brave prophet and outsider in charge of returning spirituality and wholeness to the community, but with his fall into silence, it is Cohen the one that assumes this role and starts to write a new poetry and literature closer to the social context. Cohen confronts, then, the paradoxical conflict between tradition -Jewish inheritance- and style -the poet's own expression- with a result in which he opts for a new direction that might make of him a 'front-line' writer.

In this new direction, Cohen abandons the world of mythologies of his youth and immerses himself into pop. He starts by reversing and challenging bourgeois aesthetics with controversial topics such as drugs, pornography, the imagery of Hitler and the Holocaust, sexual experimentation, etc.; he adopts, indeed, a 'carnivalesque' perspective that turns high expressions of art into low and vice versa. In this regard, a comic-stripe from Charles Axis or a coupon that promises a pair of slim legs become a sort of Joycean epiphany, i.e., a transcendental moment, whereas a tragic poem from E.J. Pratt that describes the tortures of the Jesuits Brébeuf and Lalament becomes a source of pornography in *Beautiful Losers*.

This reversal of expectations corresponds to Bakhtin's 'carnival', a concept adopted by the Russian thinker in order to describe the process of subversion and consequent liberation from those assumptions that reign in the dominant style. With the subversion and following liberation of former assumptions in the literary text, the expectations that the reader has about the work of art are inevitably challenged, so she or he needs to expand the literary horizon and cooperate with the author in order to construct meaning. The best example of this expansion in Cohen's literary production corresponds to the novel *Beautiful Losers*, in which the reader's expectations are constantly challenged by the author's illogical and extravagant

narratives; nevertheless, other works like *Flowers for Hitler* contain as well impossible and surrealist images that attack the reader's sensibility and make her or him question moral categories and the role of literature. At the same time, some of these works contain as well a preference for the extremes, so the reader finds himself or herself trapped into an unbalanced literary universe where a garrison mentality -fear of the outside and confinement- contrasts with a wild attitude that explores the marginal and the edges of the world where the 'Beautiful Losers' -the modern saints- inhabit.

This ambivalence coincides with Cohen's constant shifts from what is romantic to what is ironic; for example, the protagonist of *The Favourite Game* is both cynic and romantic with women, so he can praise Tamara's body with romantic epithets but caricatures her in a short story when he wants to break up with her. But Cohen is not only ambivalent with romantic and sexual relationships, he adopts in fact the same approach about the poet's profession: Cohen can write romantic verses that respect classical forms or adopt new poetic forms that challenge the boundaries between genres, he can use a sensuous and exuberant language or a prosaic and plain vocabulary instead, he is the self-conscious anti-poet or the romantic young man who painfully leaves his mistress, etc.

Therefore, Cohen plays with different options but does not endorse or embrace any of them, so he remains ambivalent towards the themes that obsess him. This ambivalence in Cohen's career is the result of the Montreal artist's desire and necessity for change: he changes his style from the dark-romanticism of *The Spice-Box of Earth* to the anti-poetry of *Flowers for Hitler*, he deals first with personal and intimate questions in *The Favourite Game* to later discuss political, historical, and colonial practices in *Beautiful Losers*, and he sings to a world of lovers in *Songs of Leonard Cohen* to criticize later war practices in *Songs from a Room,* when in fact Cohen's band in the 1970's was nicknamed "The Army" and he had recognized a fascination and praise for War imagery in several of his works. Furthermore, Cohen's personal attitude changes over time: from the sassy thirty-year old singer that teases journalists in the most Bob Dylan's fashion to the gentle and extremely polite old man that releases albums and gives music performances at the age of

eighty.

Nevertheless, it seems that behind all his works there is always a trace of self-mockery, both as a poet and lover, that allows him to survive and make fun of himself, such as clearly happens in songs like "One of Us Cannot Be Wrong" from the studio album *Songs of Leonard Cohen*. With his sense of humour, he can continue inhabiting a world of negativity where he is, as Irving Layton once defined him, "a narcissist who hates himself" (as cited in Flynn 2000: 11). But what truly links Cohen's works is the passion for music. In this regard, music is actually behind all the Montreal artist's works: the musicality of his poetry collections, the songs of Marvin Gaye and Ray Charles in *The Favourite Game* and *Beautiful Losers* and, of course, all Cohen's studio albums including his last *Popular Problems* released on September 2014 the day after his eightieth birthday. Leonard Cohen is, thus, a 'Beautiful Loser' and a popular poet that lives in the Global Village, so he changes over time and he mutates from the print of the Gutenberg Galaxy to the orality that the age of the 1960's demanded.

In this regard, Cohen's literary production captures this change with tensions between the visual and the oral; these tensions are not only in his poems but in his fiction as well, where radios and movies resonate, singers become 'Saints' and their songs the path to reach this sainthood, guitars play, etc. As Cohen told in 1969 to the *New York Times,* "All of my writing has guitars behind it, even the novels" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 138); furthermore, it is significant how the plots of Cohen's novels are difficult to follow and the language becomes blurry, specially in *Beautiful Losers,* which is the fiction that preceded Cohen's first record *Songs of Leonard Cohen* and it already announced the Canadian's artist shift to the world of music; a world that enabled him to dissolve his self and all of his obsessions into the chords of songs that mysteriously fascinated and still fascinate audiences. It is, then, the collective emotion of a song what made of Cohen the great popular artist he is today.

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APPENDIX A:

Resumen

Esta investigación aborda el estudio de las obras del autor canadiense Leonard Cohen en la década de los años sesenta con el fin de explorar y contextualizar las cuestiones de identidad y deseo que han marcado la producción del artista canadiense a lo largo de su carrera. Las obras que se han seleccionado para este propósito incluyen colecciones de poesía – *La caja de especias de la tierra* (1961) y *Flores para Hitler* (1964); ficción -*El juego favorito* (1963) y *Los hermosos vencidos* (1966); y álbumes musicales -*Canciones de Leonard Cohen* (1967) y *Canciones desde una habitación* (1969). Esta tesis es, por lo tanto, un viaje a través de las diferentes expresiones artísticas que el poeta de la ciudad de Montreal explora a lo largo de los años sesenta para dar forma a unas inquietudes individuales, artísticas y sociales que contienen las identidades y deseos del artista. El trabajo muestra la evolución de Cohen desde joven escritor y poeta romántico, rebelde y provocador hasta finalmente cantante de folk en la tradición que Nietzsche recoge en *El nacimiento de la tragedia* (1872) con la figura del poeta lírico. Cohen es, por lo tanto, un poeta que encuentra en la música popular un doble impulso apolíneo y dionisíaco con el que consigue cautivar a las masas.

En este sentido, la evolución de Cohen podría ser fácilmente enmarcada por la expresión de 'La Aldea Global ', un concepto que aparece por primera vez acuñado por el filósofo canadiense Marshall McLuhan en su obra *La galaxia Gutenberg* (1962). Por medio de la tecnología electrónica, McLuhan cree que el mundo se ha contraído en un pueblo o aldea en el que la

información se comparte de forma instantánea entre la población. Es en esta nueva era electrónica donde Cohen logra encontrar su público y consigue alcanzar la popularidad, de este modo, el artista aparca su carrera como poeta y escritor de ficción y se sumerge en la profesión de trovador que le permite convertirse en portavoz de su generación gracias a canciones melancólicas y misteriosas que abandonan la forma impresa de 'La galaxia Gutenberg' y abrazan la oralidad de 'La Aldea Global'. Sin embargo, los temas y obsesiones del artista siguen siendo los mismos independientemente de que sean expresados a través de poemas, novelas, o canciones.

Diferentes *Cohen* concurren a lo largo de la década de los sesenta: el romántico, el cínico, el anti-poeta, el *beatnik*, el inconformista rebelde que denuncia prácticas colonialistas, el provocador que desafía las convenciones sociales, el tradicionalista, etc. Con el fin de acercarse a cada uno de ellos, la investigación toma como referencia el trabajo de varios críticos y teóricos canadienses como Linda Hutcheon, Michael Ondaatje, o Stephen Scobie; se apoya así mismo en la biografía de Sylvie Simmons sobre Leonard Cohen, *Soy tu hombre: La vida de Leonard Cohen* (2012); y además se sustenta en algunas de las obras de relevantes pensadores y filósofos como Mikhail Bakhtin, Gilles Deleuze y Félix Guattari, o el anteriormente mencionado Marshall McLuhan. Además, la tesis explora y sustenta las interpretaciones de los textos del artista de Montreal en los artículos de diferentes expertos que han estudiado en profundidad la obra de Leonard Cohen.

La tesis se divide en cinco capítulos y un apartado final de conclusiones. El capítulo uno -'*La caja de especias de la tierra*: poemas de un judío romántico'- aborda el estudio del poemario a través de la profundización en la identidad artística y judía de Cohen, así como explora el mundo del poeta en el que el concepto de deseo adquiere una perspectiva oscura y romántica. El capítulo dos -'*El juego favorito*: una ficcionalización del artista'- analiza la primera novela de Cohen como texto fundamental para entender la identidad del artista canadiense y su actividad creativa a través del alter ego de Lawrence Breavman, el protagonista de la novela. En el capítulo siguiente -'*Flores para Hitler*: Del romance al campo de concentración'- se regresa de nuevo al género lírico con el fin de mostrar a un Cohen que cambia su

perspectiva romántica e individual por otra de carácter más social en la que el artista de Montreal probablemente se ve influido por la generación beat de la años cincuenta y el silencio del poeta canadiense y mentor de Cohen, Abraham. M. Klein, quien deja de escribir debido a una enfermedad mental. Cohen centra ahora su interés en la exploración del concepto del mal en el siglo XX y decide usar las imágenes del Holocausto nazi como metáfora de lo cruel y perverso en el ser humano. Seguidamente, el capítulo cuatro -*Los hermosos vencidos*: una novela canadiense y posmodernista en los límites del deseo- sigue ahondando no sólo en la perspectiva social y política que Cohen adopta en *Flores para Hitler*, sino que introduce además un mundo de santos y "hermosos vencidos" muy característico de la producción artística del autor. Además, *Los hermosos vencidos* señala ya la entrada en el posmodernismo canadiense con el carácter rupturista e innovador de la obra. Por último, el capítulo cinco -'*Canciones de Leonard Cohen* y *Canciones desde un habitación*: Una nueva dirección en la carrera de Cohen'- aborda el estudio de sus dos primeros álbumes musicales en los que el artista canadiense canta primero a un mundo de romance y amantes, mientras que en su segundo disco opta por transmitir un mensaje antibélico en el que denuncia la violencia y la explotación de los soldados en la época de la guerra de Vietnam.

A continuación se sintetiza el contenido de los cinco capítulos de la investigación:

Capítulo 1: *La caja de especias de la tierra* es el segundo volumen de poesía de Cohen y constituye un texto fundamental para entender la identidad artística del poeta de Montreal, ya que contiene muchos de los temas y obsesiones que han perseguido al poeta canadiense a lo largo de su carrera. El libro obtuvo un gran éxito de crítica y fue bien acogido entre el público, lo que supuso un paso importante en la carrera de Cohen después de la discreta publicación de su primera colección de poesía *Comparemos mitologías* cuando el poeta apenas era un estudiante universitario. Cohen consigue ganar con *La caja de especias de la tierra* precisión, claridad, y madurez a la hora de mostrar en sus versos sus obsesiones, preocupaciones, etc. En este sentido, se deshace de la tradición y de la mitología que abrazaba en su

anterior colección de poesía para explorar un universo artístico propio en el que la tradición, tal y como el título de la colección sugiere, sigue presente pero no ocupa una posición central sino que está al servicio del poeta y de su universo interior.

Los poemas de la colección resultan ambivalentes al presentarse tan románticos como irónicos; Cohen toma consciencia del grado de romanticismo de *Comparemos mitologías* y se burla de su actitud romántica en *La caja de especias de la tierra.* Sin embargo, todavía prevalece en sus nuevos versos un estilo limpio y pulido en el que la rima y el lenguaje transmiten una belleza propia de lo romántico. Cambian no obstante los temas y preguntas que el artista explora, si antes Cohen ahondaba en lo romántico ahora se centra en los aspectos más oscuros del deseo y las relaciones amorosas. Esta misma actitud romántica a la par que irónica es la que sostiene el protagonista de la primera novela de Cohen *El juego favorito*, quien comparte algunas de sus obsesiones y preocupaciones con el poeta de *La caja de especias de la tierra,* tal y como el impulso creativo que brota de las relaciones románticas y sexuales, así como la incapacidad para el compromiso en las relaciones personales.

La primera parte del volumen recoge poemas que tienen que ver con el proceso de la creación y la relación entre el artista y su obra de arte. Entre estos poemas destaca "A Kite is a victim", es la pieza que abre la colección y es uno de los poemas más representativos de la obra de Cohen en el que el poeta describe las tensiones que existen entre la necesidad de control y el deseo de libertad. En este sentido, la "cometa" se convierte en "symbolic of our ego and ambitions, of all that is original and free in us" (Ondaatje 1970: 16); así, el deseo del artista se convierte en 'domar' y controlar a la cometa. Sin embargo, el artista tiene limitaciones tal y como se muestra en poemas como "After the Sabbath Prayers" y "Flowers That I Left in the Ground", en el que las capacidades del poeta se ven disminuidas hasta el punto de perder el control sobre la obra de arte. Sin embargo, otros poemas de la colección como "As if it were Spring" presentan a un artista dominante que no duda en asesinar con el fin de crear belleza. El poeta ocupa la misma posición en "There Are Some Men", pero esta vez consigue alcanzar una posición más digna al homenajear a un amigo fallecido. El poema, por otro lado, termina

con el rechazo del romanticismo que a menudo prevalece en las elegías, y es esta misma negación de los valores románticos la que se encuentra en poemas como "I Have Not Lingered on European Monasteries" o "I Wonder how many People in this City", piezas en las que el poeta critica pero a la vez abraza la tradición romántica. De este modo, la actitud ambivalente prevalece en *La caja de especias de la tierra* y el artista rechaza el romanticismo que por otro lado anhela. La ambivalencia se vuelve relevante en "The Cuckold's Song", un buen poema que no quiere ser un poema:

> If this looks like a poem
> I might as well warn you at the beginning
> that it's not meant to be one.
> I don't want to turn anything into poetry (Cohen 1999: 100).

De hecho, Cohen participa al final de esta pieza como actor mostrando ya en este volumen de poemas su preferencia por las máscaras y la figura del anti-poeta, una actitud que mantendrá más adelante en su producción artística.

El segundo grupo de poemas constituye la parte central de *La caja de especias de la tierra* en la que el poeta aborda las relaciones románticas. La mayor parte de los poemas se acerca a la temática amorosa desde el ángulo de la incertidumbre, la duda, la obsesión personal, etc. Por lo tanto, Cohen se aleja de la noción de amor ideal para abrazar el "lado oscuro del amor" tal y como hacen autores como Baudelaire, Rimbaud, etc. En este sentido, los poemas describen relaciones de dominación personal basadas en la violencia y crueldad, tal y como "Morning Song" o "The Toy Girl", este último texto explora por ejemplo el miedo a la dominación mecánica sobre la humanidad. Por otro lado, otros poemas de esta sección reflejan las dudas del poeta, quien no sabe si permanecer junto a su amante o partir con el fin de iniciar un viaje de auto-descubrimiento artístico, tal y como ocurre en "Travel", o en "Credo", en el que el poeta debe decir entre unirse o no a la nación hebrea en su éxodo.

Breavman comparte el mismo conflicto en *El juego favorito,* y aunque encuentra en el personaje de Shell a la compañera perfecta decide finalmente abandonarla en última instancia en favor de su arte. Por otra parte, el poema de la colección "As the mist leaves no scar" aparece como epígrafe de la novela y sirve para sugerir el final doloroso de una relación, así a pesar de la "delicadeza" y de la atmósfera de inocencia que impregna los versos, la pieza se torna grave y áspera entroncando con la preferencia de Cohen por mostrar la 'oscuridad' en las relaciones amorosas.

Por el contrario, "For Anne" es una balada simple en la que no está claro donde comienza el romance y termina la ironía, en este sentido, es una pieza ambivalente que encaja con el espíritu del volumen. Sin embargo, la pieza central y más representativa de este grupo es "You have the lovers", un poema que introduce los temas sobre los que Cohen reflexionará más tarde en *Los hermosos vencidos*. La sexualidad ocupa el primer plano en este poema en el que una pareja es observada por un tercer miembro que en última instancia participará en el encuentro sexual con el fin de alcanzar la santidad. En este sentido, la sexualidad se convierte en una nueva religión y una disciplina que hay que aprender a fin de obtener la santidad que los protagonistas de *Los hermosos perdedores* buscan desesperadamente.

El tercer grupo de poemas recoge la herencia y tradición hebraica en la que Cohen crece y se desarrolla como artista. En esta sección hay poemas dedicados a otros artistas y poetas, como "Last Dance en el Four Penny", en el que Cohen se dirige a su amigo el poeta Irving Layton y anuncia el declive de la tradición hebraica con el fin de la 'Freilach' -una danza judía-. En "Song for Abraham Klein" y "For a Teacher" Cohen confirma esta decadencia con el silencio del maestro Klein, quien deja de ser el profeta de la comunidad para recluirse en silencio en su hogar a causa de una enfermedad mental. Otros poemas de este grupo describen en términos gloriosos a la comunidad judía, como en "Out of the Land of Heaven", un poema en tono de celebración que Cohen dedica al pintor Marc Chagall. No obstante, el lado más oscuro de la herencia hebraica encuentra su mejor expresión en "The Genius", un poema irónico y aterrador que profundiza en los diferentes estereotipos que se han impuesto a los judíos a lo largo de la historia y que tiene como consecuencia la irrupción del Holocausto en la última estrofa del poema.

Finalmente, el libro termina rindiendo homenaje a profetas hebraicos como Isaías, así como a miembros de la familia de Cohen, en este caso a su abuelo materno que se erige como el protagonista de la pieza que cierra la colección "Lines from my Grandfather's Journal", un poema en prosa que describe una vez más, tal y como sucede en "A Kite is a Victim", las tensiones entre la tradición y la creación, es decir, entre el control y la libertad.

Capítulo 2: *El juego favorito* narra la historia y el proceso de madurez hacia la edad adulta de un joven artista de Montreal que abandona su comunidad con el fin de conseguir vivir bajo la promesa de la libertad. Existen múltiples paralelismos entre la novela de Cohen y el *Retrato del artista adolescente* de James Joyce, ya que ambas no son sólo narraciones modernistas sino que adoptan también la forma del subgénero romántico del *Künstlerroman,* es decir, los dos libros narran el despertar creativo y el descubrimiento de la vocación de un joven artista a través del esquema del *Buildungsroman* de la tradición romántica alemana. Por otro lado, el fondo romántico de la novela coexiste con la actitud irónica de Breavman, quien a menudo bromea sobre su romanticismo y ambiciones artísticas aunque siga siendo el romántico que idealiza la infancia y las relaciones amorosas.

Lawrence Breavman parece ser el alter ego en la ficción de Leonard Cohen al narrar recuerdos de la infancia y la juventud en Montreal y Nueva York que coinciden con la biografía de Cohen. El libro es, por lo tanto, una especie de autobiografía narrada en tercera persona. De hecho, hay muchos personajes de la novela inspirados en amigos y familiares de Cohen, tal y como el mejor amigo del protagonista 'Krantz', quien se asemeja al escultor Mort Rosengarten, así como 'Shell' está inspirado en la primera novia de Cohen, Georgiana Sherman. En este sentido, Carmen Ellison en su artículo "Not My Real Face", así como otros críticos han explorado la implicación personal de Cohen en la novela y la han definido como una "thinly veiled autobiography" (McFarlane, 1999: 73).

La novela sigue siendo modernista a pesar de que ya emplea técnicas como la intertextualidad y la referencialidad a la obra literaria que ya implican una sensibilidad posmoderna en la que se incluye una reflexión sobre el proceso creativo y las estructuras autoreferenciales como el *Mise en*

abyme. Sin embargo, la novela sólo es autorreflexiva en su contenido pero no en su forma, ya que no profundiza al contrario que la segunda novela de Cohen -*Los hermosos vencidos*- en las estructuras más características de la metaficción.

La trama de la novela es casi inexistente, en este sentido, el texto se ocupa de recoger diferentes momentos en la vida del artista que van desde la década de 1940 hasta la década de 1950. El libro contiene cuatro partes en las que el lector llega a conocer a Breavman como niño y adolescente y en las que se exploran sus obsesiones, preocupaciones, relaciones, etc. Estos episodios emplean técnicas cinematográficas a la hora de construir el retrato de Breavman en la novela, quien aparece siempre en las escenas de la narración como protagonista. Además, el uso de la técnica cinematográfica en *El juego favorito* coincide con las técnicas que otras obras narrativas de la época empleaban, tal y como *El guardián entre el centeno* y *En el camino.* De hecho, ésta última recoge movimientos contraculturales con los que Cohen compartía un interés por una búsqueda creativa y religiosa, así como una exploración del yo interior.

La novela se presenta como un texto fundamental para entender la identidad canadiense y hebraica de Cohen como artista. La narración se desarrolla en la ciudad de Montreal, Nueva York, así como en los espacios naturales de Canadá que contrastan con la aglomeración de la urbe. No obstante, la novela muestra un retrato de la nación canadiense en decadencia en la que la burguesía es conformista y convencional, así como se encuentra más preocupada por los negocios en vez de por cuestiones como la religión y la preservación de la tradición. Breavman reacciona contra este ambiente y se rebela adoptando la vida de un artista bohemio que desafía las normas de su familia y de una comunidad que ha trazado para él un futuro como empresario y hombre de negocios. Así, Breavman va a rechazar el modelo tradicional que tanto su familia y comunidad quieren para él y va encontrar un refugio en el arte y las relaciones románticas. Se convierte, por lo tanto, en el artista romántico de su comunidad que anhela volver a la infancia y cuestiona la naturaleza humana; sin embargo, el joven Breavman es a su vez muy consciente de la imagen que proyecta con su profesión y a menudo se burla con ironía de su romanticismo y del oficio de poeta que él ha escogido.

La evolución del personaje de Breavman en la novela contrasta con la de su mejor amigo Krantz, quien termina convirtiéndose en un joven adulto convencional que trabaja en un campamento de verano y tiene una novia formal. Krantz es, por lo tanto, absorbido por el sistema al contrario que Breavman, quien permanece como figura extranjera y rebelde para la comunidad. La separación entre los dos amigos se tornará inevitable y el fin de su amistad se precipitará con la muerte de Martin, un niño y genio matemático que asiste al campamento de verano que Krantz dirige y que muere accidentalmente atropellado por un tractor. Breavman, quien durante su estancia en el campamento se hace amigo de Martin, se siente profundamente afectado por la muerte del niño y es después de este trágico evento cuando abandona el campamento de verano, rompe su amistad con Krantz y su relación amorosa con Shell, y comprende que debe abandonar su comunidad al no encontrar acomodo en "el mundo convencional" tal y como él lo conoce.

Breavman no sólo encuentra en el arte un refugio frente al "mundo convencional", sino que a su vez ésta le proporciona la ilusión de permanencia en el tiempo. En este sentido, Breavman busca desesperadamente a lo largo de la novela detener el tiempo y conseguir que los momentos importantes se vuelvan eternos; por ejemplo, el joven artista visiona una y otra vez las películas familiares del pasado, así como trata de conservar todos los recuerdos de su infancia y adolescencia. De este modo, Breavman retiene en su memoria sus juegos con su amiga Lisa en la nieve, así como sus paseos en coche con Krantz, con quien recorre las calles de Montreal. No obstante, Breavman también asiste en la novela a los estragos y la decadencia que conlleva el paso del tiempo en la que la destrucción de los cuerpos es inevitable: la muerte de su padre a una edad temprana, el envejecimiento del rostro de su madre, las cicatrices de los cuerpos de sus amantes, etc. En este sentido, las cicatrices se convierten en un símbolo de la novela que confirman el deterioro y el fracaso de Breavman a la hora de intentar preservar los momentos importantes en su vida. Pero las cicatrices no sólo dañan la apariencia física, sino que también causan daños no visibles en el cuerpo, tal y como el dolor que Breavman siente ante la muerte de Martin, o el dolor que el propio Breavman deja en sus amantes cuando se

marcha en busca de inspiración artística y nuevas experiencias.

Como joven adulto, Breavman no puede seguir recurriendo a los juegos de su infancia en los que exploraba e indagaba acerca de los sentimientos en el mundo adulto, pero con la ventaja e impunidad de no herir en ellos a nadie. De este modo, Lisa y él juegan a "El soldado y la Prostituta" hasta que irrumpe en sus vidas la adolescencia con el consiguiente descubrimiento de una sexualidad que pone fin a su amistad y al control que Breavman ejerce sobre los juegos. Es en este punto cuando el joven artista empezará a involucrarse en relaciones románticas en las que separará su vida social de la sexual, lo que le permitirá seguir controlando su participación en estas relaciones a la vez que seguir preservando la opción de abandonarlas cuando sienta la necesidad de buscar una nueva inspiración artística.

En este sentido, Breavman termina abandonado incluso a Shell, la joven que conoce en la universidad de Columbia en Nueva York y que encaja con su ideal de "esposa perfecta". El personaje de 'Shell' representa en la novela un punto de inflexión en el que Breavman se plantea abandonar su vida como artista para convertirse en lo que él llama un ciudadano convencional. De hecho, Shell no es una amante más de Breavman en *El juego favorito,* sino que es la protagonista de su propia historia en la tercera parte de la novela, en la que el lector aprende detalles de la existencia de Shell antes de conocer a Breavman, tal y como su relación con su esposo Gordon y su affaire ocasional con un profesor de la Universidad del Líbano. Por lo tanto, Shell para Breavman no es sólo una mujer hermosa a la que convertir en su amante, sino que es también una persona con una historia propia que colisiona en un momento dado con la de Breavman. No obstante, es discutible el tratamiento que Cohen le da tanto a Shell como al resto de personajes femeninos en la novela, puesto que éstos parecen estar siempre al servicio del protagonista a la vez que su desarrollo en la narración, incluso en el caso de Shell, siempre es limitado. De cualquier modo, el objetivo final de Breavman parece siempre el de crear bellas imágenes que poder abandonar después, así posiblemente las amantes de Breavman se convierten también en una inspiración perfecta que el artista abandona finalmente. Así, al final de la novela Breavman aparece sentado en una cafetería mientras escribe en una servilleta recuerdos de su infancia; el

protagonista ya ha roto sus relaciones tanto con Shell como con su amigo Krantz, pero conserva por otro lado su memoria, recuerdo y la esperanza de encontrar una nueva dirección como artista. Breavman es, por lo tanto, el artista que decide emprender un nuevo viaje.

Capítulo 3: En *Flores para Hitler*, Cohen pone fin al lirismo y tradición de sus anteriores colecciones para adentrarse en una poesía de corte más contemporáneo que le permita explorar nuevas formas y temas. El cambio de estilo en *Flores para Hitler* provocó diferentes reacciones entre la crítica en la que se sucedieron elogios y críticas a partes iguales. No obstante, el artista canadiense consiguió con este poemario el Premio Literario de Québec en 1964 y el reconocimiento fruto de una intensa gira promocional en la que Cohen empezó a ser consciente de su condición de personaje público.

Los nuevos poemas de Cohen rompen con la tradición de la poesía inglesa del siglo XIX y adoptan nuevas formas como el uso del verso libre, la mezcla de géneros en los que la lírica se adentra en la prosa y el teatro, así como el uso de un lenguaje deliberadamente feo y prosaico. En este sentido, el libro ya no es una colección de poemas bonitos sino que representa una nueva postura en la que el poeta dice no creer más en la poesía, es decir, Cohen se afirma en su rol de anti-poeta a la vez que incorpora nuevos temas y metáforas que le permiten explorar algunas de las realidades sociales del siglo XX, tal y como la Guerra Fría, la nación de Canadá, y especialmente el nazismo y el Holocausto. No obstante, el artista no va a tratar estos temas desde una perspectiva histórica sino personal, lo que conllevará una división de opiniones entre la crítica respecto al tratamiento que Cohen adopta ante acontecimientos tan trágicos como el Holocausto. Por ejemplo, Sandra Djawa considera que la obra del artista canadiense es sensacionalista y oportunista, mientras que otros críticos como Sandra Wynands defienden el uso que el poeta hace de la tragedia del Holocausto como medio para sorprender al público y cuestionar la noción del arte. Así mismo, las posiciones de los críticos difieren en torno al hecho de tratar el Holocausto como un hecho aislado en la historia que no puede volver a repetirse dada su crueldad, o por el contrario, un trágico evento que puede darse de nuevo en circunstancias diferentes.

Cohen responde con firmeza en *Flores para Hitler* que el Holocausto no es una excepción y que, por lo tanto, se puede interpretar como una manifestación más del odio que alberga el ser humano y por el que todos somos en mayor o menor medida responsables. En este sentido, el artista de Montreal utiliza en el epígrafe de *Flores para Hitler* las palabras del escritor y superviviente de un campo de concentración Primo Levi:

> If from the inside of the lager, a message
> could have seeped out to free men, it would
> have been this: Take care not to suffer in
> your own homes what is inflected on us here (as cited in Ondaatje 1970: 38).

El mal está, entonces, en todas partes y no sólo en los campos de concentración. Para expresar esta preocupación, Cohen adopta un estilo provocador que desafía las categorías morales del lector de lo que es aceptable o no. El poeta incluye en su colección técnicas experimentales, surrealismo y simbolismo, así como añade diferentes tipos de datos en los poemas tal y como fechas, notas, listas, entradas de un diario, etc. En este sentido, en *Flores para Hitler* el poeta ya se encuentra codificando el estilo de la segunda novela del artista canadiense *Los hermosos vencidos* -el texto más conocido de la obra de Cohen y en el que desarrollará plenamente los temas y estilo de esta colección-. Por lo tanto, *Flores para Hitler* se convierte en una obra fundamental para la posterior redacción de *Los hermosos vencidos,* así aparecen ya en este volumen de poesía algunos de los "santos" protagonistas como Alexander Trocchi, la reina Victoria, e Irving Layton. Cohen abandona, por lo tanto, las preocupaciones románticas y personales de sus anteriores colecciones de poemas y da un paso hacia delante con la intención de convertirse en el profeta -'outsider'- de su comunidad y poder explorar nuevos territorios como la condición de lo cruel en el mundo y el camino hacia una nueva santidad.

Cohen rompe con su estilo tradicional desde el primer poema de esta colección – "What am I doing here?" - aquí el artista canadiense utiliza un

lenguaje prosaico y huye del ornamento poético. El poema se erige como una confesión de culpabilidad, el poeta es un altavoz para todos aquellos que participan en la construcción de una sociedad cruel de la que sin embargo el orador no es el único responsable, lo que le hará emerger en última instancia desde una posición de superioridad moral. Él se presenta, de hecho, como un líder que se niega a formar parte de "la coartada universal" que protege al resto de individuos. Por lo tanto, lo que al principio parece ser una confesión termina siendo una invitación por parte del poeta a que su audiencia confiese también su parte de culpabilidad. Existe, por lo tanto, una posición de superioridad moral en el poema en la que el artista actúa como profeta ante su audiencia. El poeta adopta la misma actitud en "The Hearth", pero esta vez Cohen se burla de sí mismo y parodia su posición de profeta, "I also learnt my lust / was not so rare a masterpiece" (2011: 10), el tono del poema no es por lo tanto tan seguro como en "What am I doing here?", lo mismo ocurre en otros poemas de la colección como "Destiny", en los que el autor relativiza la profesión de poeta e introduce la autoparodia en la que no existe lugar para la figura del escritor como profeta o líder de una comunidad.

El poema "Style" -pieza central de *Flores para Hitler*- presenta la nueva actitud que Cohen adopta hacia su poesía, así en “Style” hay una total falta de descuido en las estrofas en las que no existe una puntuación cuidada, los versos son irregulares, el lenguaje es vulgar, etc. Sin embargo, “Style” sigue siendo un buen poema aun proclamando paradójicamente la destrucción de estilo. La actitud anti-poética del autor va a ser también protagonista en poemas como "Montreal 1964" y "Music Crept by Us", donde se erradica cualquier intento de crear belleza en unos versos deliberadamente vulgares. Sin embargo, la colección también ofrece poemas que no se centran en la cuestión del estilo sino en la realidad social y el entorno de Cohen, tal y como "The Only Tourist in Habana Turns his Thoughts Homeward", un poema irónico e ingenioso en el que el poeta hace una retrospección de los problemas que sufre Canadá desde la convulsa isla de Cuba sumida en pleno periodo revolucionario; el poeta propone diferentes acciones para resolver los problemas de Canadá, sin embargo, estas soluciones resultan humorísticos y en su mayoría imposibles de realizar. La misma sátira se

sucede en otros poemas como "Business as Usual", en el que el poeta critica fuertemente a los políticos canadienses, a quien tacha de "The favourite villains of all Canadians" (Scobie, 1978: 36).

Como se ha mencionado anteriormente, hay poemas de la colección que exploran aquellos aspectos más terribles y oscuros del alma humana, tal y como "A Migrating Dialogue", una pieza en la que el autor implica a toda la cultura occidental como cómplice de las atrocidades nazis. Cohen utiliza imágenes que provocan y desafían la estética convencional, y aunque predomine el tema del nazismo introducido a través del surrealismo, el autor describe también otros eventos en la historia tal y como la bomba de Hiroshima, la Primera Guerra Mundial, el fuego sobre ciudades alemanas como Dresde, etc. En el poema se van sucediendo así diferentes escenarios históricos que culminan abruptamente al final del poema con la imagen desconcertante de los personajes de Hitler, Eva Braun, y Geli Raubal manteniendo relaciones sexuales. Una imagen que deja así en suspensión al resto de tragedias que en el poema se describen y que forman parte del concepto del mal en la sociedad occidental.

La imagen de Hitler en *Flores para Hitler* está en general construida desde un tono surrealista; él es el protagonista de poemas como "Hitler the Brain-Mole", "Hitler", y "Opium and Hitler", así en estas piezas coexiste tanto la fantasía como la historia. Por otro lado, hay poemas como "The Invisible Trouble" y "Heirloom" en los que la imagen de los campos de concentración impregna un ámbito doméstico aparentemente normal. De este modo, el terror y el odio también existen en la realidad cotidiana y no sólo en la Alemania nazi. Sin embargo, es precisamente la metáfora del Holocausto la que termina prevaleciendo con poemas como "All There is to Know about Adolf Eichmann" y "Goebbels Abandons his Novel and Join the Party", en los que el autor describe a dos importantes figuras del nazismo como hombres comunes y vulgares en vez de terribles villanos. Por lo tanto, el autor pone de relieve una vez más la idea de que el mal no es algo exclusivo de un reducido grupo de personas, sino que por el contrario puede emerger de cualquier individuo.

A pesar de que *Flores para Hitler* pone el foco en un mundo de terror, Cohen también aborda en este volumen las relaciones de poder, así como

reanuda la retórica del maestro y el alumno ya presente en *La caja de especias de la tierra*. Algunos ejemplos de la colección son "My Mentors", "My Teacher is Dying", y "Old Dialogues", en este último poema Cohen describe un proceso de aprendizaje similar al que el lector se encontrará posteriormente en *Los hermosos vencidos* con las lecciones que F. da al protagonista para convertirse en un santo. Además, la colección incluye ya poemas que muestran directamente la figura del santo que logra superar los terrores de la realidad cotidiana y alcanza la santidad, como sucede por ejemplo en "For Anyone Dressed in Marble".

Flores para Hitler dedica así un grupo de poemas a aquellos individuos que como en *Los hermosos vencidos* no encajan en la sociedad y optan por refugiarse en el mundo del pop, tal y como sucede en "Order", o en un paso de baile, como en "The New Step", de este modo la colección muestra a unos nuevos santos que aun siendo considerados parias por parte de la sociedad consiguen al final trascender la realidad. Además, los personajes históricos como por ejemplo la reina Victoria, Irving Layton, y Alexander Trocchi pasan a ser los nuevos santos de la era moderna que Cohen propone.

La colección se cierra con un grupo de poemas de tono romántico que recuerda a la primera obra de Cohen *Comparemos mitologías*; en estas piezas existe un deseo de huir lejos de la realidad y de la maldad anteriormente expuesta en el volumen, así por ejemplo en "Nothing to Lose", "For EJP", y "Another Night with the Telescope", Cohen vuelve a retomar viejos temas y se coloca su corona de 'chico de oro de la literatura canadiense'.

Capítulo 4: *Los hermosos vencidos* es una novela sobre Canadá y su historia: el texto realiza saltos en el tiempo con el fin de presentar una nación de vencedores y vencidos en la que el psique canadiense tiende a identificarse con la víctima (Atwood, 1972). En este sentido, el protagonista de *Los hermosos vencidos* es una víctima que necesita sentirse como tal, al igual que el resto de los personajes de la novela son también víctimas en mayor o menor medida. El protagonista, "I", sufre un conflicto similar al del ethos de Canadá, así "I" percibe la historia como una forma de opresión de la que va a intentar liberarse a través de las enseñanzas y el sistema que su mejor amigo, F., diseña para él con el fin de conseguir llegar a la magia y la

santidad.

Además de la historia personal del narrador que se desarrolla en el Québec contemporáneo, la novela muestra un discurso político sobre Canadá y su historia que abarca desde las invasiones francesas hasta la influencia de la cultura norteamericana contemporánea. A través del personaje de la virgen Catalina Tekawitha, el lector llega a conocer a las tribus de nativos canadienses, así como la posterior colonización por parte de los jesuitas en el siglo XVII, un largo proceso que incluyó prácticas imperialistas, tal y como el cambio de los nombres propios de los nativos, así como su conversión a la fe católica. Sin embargo, Gran Bretaña pronto lograría fortalecer su posición y terminaría obteniendo el control de la región de Québec imponiendo su lengua y cultura sobre la población francesa hasta la construcción del Québec moderno, donde el trío protagonista -el narrador, su esposa Edith, y F.- viven su particular historia.

La novela captura el ambiente del Montreal de los años sesenta y las tensiones que prevalecen entre las diferentes culturas que coexisten en Canadá: nativos, franceses e ingleses. En este sentido, F. es un revolucionario canadiense y francés que atenta contra la estatua de la reina Victoria en Montreal, Edith es una mujer nativa que pertenece a la misma tribu de Catalina Tekawitha y que fue atacada sexualmente por un grupo de hombres franceses en su adolescencia, y finalmente el narrador y protagonista de la novela es un judío de habla inglesa acosado por una multitud de franceses del Québec.

El narrador culpa a instituciones como la iglesia católica de las tensiones que prevalecen en la nación de Canadá, "I" acusa así a la iglesia de ser incapaz de gestionar y hacer frente a asuntos como la sexualidad, un aspecto oculto que ha generado una sensación de frustración general en el país. No obstante, la Iglesia no es el único responsable de los problemas de Canadá sino que también entra en juego la potente cultura de los EE.UU, la cual amenaza con hacer desaparecer la identidad canadiense a base de artefactos culturales como las películas de Hollywood, así como la influencia de los nuevos santos basados en estrellas del cine como Marilyn Monroe. Por otro lado, la novela se sirve del concepto de 'carnaval' de Bakhtin a la hora de invertir las expresiones de la cultura popular procedentes de EEUU, tal y

como los cómics y canciones pop que pasan a formar parte de un arte elevado que aglutina lo más solemne y profundo, mientras que por el contrario la poesía canadiense pasa a ridiculizarse por su estilo refinado y se emplea como material pornográfico. En este sentido, Cohen muestra interés por aquellas expresiones culturales menos 'refinadas' que devuelven a la literatura realidades corporales, así como una sexualidad que forma parte de la propia esencia de la literatura.

Cohen inaugura con *Los hermosos perdedores* una tradición posmodernista en la novela canadiense, así el artista de Montreal escribe su segunda obra de ficción influenciado por una nueva narrativa basada en los pensamientos filosóficos del posmodernismo, así como por las obras de autores relevantes como Samuel Beckett, Alexander Trocchi, y William S. Burroughs. No obstante, son las especificidades de la nación canadiense las que hacen que *Los hermosos vencidos* ofrezca una nueva comprensión de la tradición en la que la dualidad de una sociedad atrapada entre dos mundos tiene que hacer frente a retos como las nociones de centro y el margen en su literatura. En este sentido, recursos como la ironía, paradoja, y sátira van a jugar un papel fundamental en el posmodernismo canadiense a la hora de acercarse a la experiencia poscolonial de su literatura.

Por otro lado, otro concepto importante en el posmodernismo canadiense es el de metaficción historiográfica, un término acuñado por la crítica literaria Linda Hutcheon que alude a la ficción basada en hechos históricos, pero que al mismo tiempo reflexiona abiertamente sobre el acto de la escritura y la naturaleza de la ficción, tal y como sucede con el narrador de *Los hermosos perdedores* que hace continuamente observaciones a sus lectores, "O Reader, do you know that a man like you is writing this?" (Cohen 2001: 102). Además, por otro lado el lector tiene ahora un papel importante a la hora de construir el significado de la novela, así éste debe suspender su lógica y aceptar las indeterminaciones que la obra de arte propone; se rompe, por lo tanto, el contrato implícito entre escritor y lector.

La indeterminación de la novela hace que de *Los hermosos perdedores* una narración compleja de difícil comprensión. El libro está dividido en tres partes narradas por diferentes voces, así en la primera parte de la novela el lector se encuentra con el diario personal del narrador, en la segunda parte

se encuentra la carta que el mejor amigo del narrador, F. escribe para él, mientras que la tercera parte es un epílogo escrito en tercera persona. La narración no es lineal y la trama es confusa y poco relevante, en cambio, los personajes adquieren relevancia en la expansión de su situación. Así mismo, la intertextualidad desempeña un papel importante en la expansión de estos personajes, ya que proporciona al autor materiales de distintas tradiciones que van desde las crónicas jesuitas, las leyendas indias, los cómics y las historias de santos que permiten que Cohen construya su propia hagiografía. Por otra parte, la novela no sólo emplea referencias textuales, sino que también se sirve de otros medios de comunicación tales como la radio, el cine, anuncios, etc, que contribuyen a la construcción de un 'collage' que se mantiene unido por el concepto de deseo.

El deseo está restringido por el idioma inglés, el cual no posee la terminología adecuada para expresar con propiedad esta condición. Por el contrario, el lenguaje iroquois emerge como el vehículo perfecto para expresar las emociones y significados ocultos, así las tribus nativas disfrutan de un lenguaje oral con el que no sólo comunican emociones sino que transmiten conocimientos y tradiciones. Por lo tanto, la novela propone una división entre el lenguaje oral de los nativos frente al lenguaje escrito del Canadá contemporáneo, que se manifiesta en el texto con el libro de oraciones que F. regala al narrador y en el que existen dos columnas, una en inglés y otra con su traducción al griego que representan la dicotomía de lo sagrado y lo profano acuñada por el sociólogo Émile Durkhem con el fin de distinguir la trascendencia de lo mundano. Este libro de oraciones sirve para ilustrar los problemas y dificultades de la comunicación que Catalina Tekawitha sufre en diferentes situaciones y que terminan en última instancia en el silencio sepulcral de una oración. Además de las palabras escritas en el libro de oraciones, Cohen también se sirve de otros recursos como el uso de letras mayúsculas a la hora de recordar al lector el aspecto visual de una novela que se mueve entre la oralidad de la tribu y la impresión de la palabra escrita de la era Gutenberg. Esta división recuerda a las teorías de McLuhan sobre la naturaleza del lenguaje escrito y oral, así existen dos formas de lenguaje en la que o bien el individuo -escritura- o la comunidad -oralidad- prevalece.

Frente a estas dos opciones de lenguaje, Cohen propone en *Los hermosos vencidos* una nueva forma en la que el sonido femenino contraste con el masculino que silencia el grupo con su individualidad. Así, este nuevo lenguaje incorpora tanto el principio femenino como el masculino y ambos convergen en la expresión de deseo. El principio femenino está encarnado en la novela por la figura de Isis, diosa egipcia en la que confluyen todos los personajes femeninos de la novela y que representa la capacidad de ayuda de la mujer en el mundo. Así, todos los personajes femeninos de la novela -Edith, Catherine Tekawitha, y Mary Voolnd- actúan como benefactoras en la novela, y es precisamente levantando el velo de Isis como el protagonista logra encontrar el camino hacia la santidad y el lector puede finalmente comprender el texto. No obstante, el levantamiento del velo se anuncia ya desde un primer momento en el epígrafe de la novela con la letra de una canción de Ray Charles.

Es en la tercera parte de la novela cuando el protagonista del epílogo visita el teatro y se convierte en una película de Ray Charles que invade el cielo de Montreal. Así, el narrador consigue trascender la realidad y alcanzar la santidad una vez ha aprendido a deshacerse de su conciencia individual para abrazar la emoción colectiva que le capacita para encontrar la magia dentro de la realidad mundana. Sin embargo, al final de la novela parece que todavía persiste la opresión y que la liberación no es completa, puesto que personajes como Edith y Catherine Tekawitha no consiguen alcanzar un equilibrio y persisten en actitudes extremas que van desde un exagerado fervor religioso a una exploración de la sexualidad sin límite que terminará poniendo fin a sus vidas. Por otro lado, F. también termina derrotado por los extremos y se encuentra confinado en un psiquiátrico, desde el que reconoce como su amigo "I" ha trascendido sus enseñanzas y ha conseguido un equilibrio propio sólo de los santos. El narrador es, por lo tanto, el único personaje que consigue "levantar el velo" de Isis y en el que se convergen a partes iguales lo sagrado y profano.

La sexualidad juega un papel protagonista en *Los hermosos vencidos*, ya que no sólo se explora desde un punto de vista personal sino también político y social conectando la novela de Cohen con el trabajo de los filósofos franceses Deleuze y Guattari. Así, el deseo encarna un proceso positivo de la

producción que produce la realidad y en el que Canadá se convierte en un universo de "máquinas deseantes" que libera a los individuos de categorías rígidas. Sin embargo, la sexualidad encuentra su expresión más brutal en el episodio de violación de Edith, una práctica colonial en forma de agresión sexual. Finalmente, la sexualidad también se mecaniza en *Los hermosos vencidos* con diferentes experiencias como "La danza telefónica", "El vibrador danés", y "la maquinaria eterna de lo ordinario", experiencias todas ellas que conectan a los protagonistas y les proporcionan momentos intensos que al igual que las canciones de la novela encierran una promesa de santidad.

Capítulo 5: Cohen cambia la dirección de su carrera artística con la publicación de su primer álbum *Canciones de Leonard Cohen,* un trabajo con el que consigue cruzar las fronteras canadienses y capta la atención de las audiencias europeas y norteamericanas. Pese a los problemas y desacuerdos que el artista tuvo con los productores del disco, Cohen lanza su disco en diciembre de 1967 con diez canciones que recogen el universo del artista. En este universo predominan las relaciones de poder entre amos y esclavos, el romanticismo, la ironía, la violencia, etc. El disco posee un carácter íntimo dada la discreta producción de las canciones en las que pone de relieve la voz de Cohen sobre el resto de instrumentos.

"Suzanne" es la canción de apertura y una de las más populares del repertorio de Cohen y del mundo del pop, en ella Cohen se vuelve a acercar a la figura del perdedor con el personaje de 'Suzanne', una mujer fascinante que vive junto al río y que encarna el concepto de santo, así el autor la compara con Jesús cuando ésta enseña su disciplina "where to look /under the garbage and the flowers" (Cohen 2009). Además, la canción tiene una atmósfera de misterio en la que la melodía, el coro femenino, la letra y la simbología del agua funcionan en un conjunto que sigue fascinando a la audiencia años después.

Sin embargo, el disco contiene también piezas que exploran aspectos más oscuro de las relaciones personales, tal y como el triángulo que aparece en "The Master Song", en el que cada miembro busca obtener poder sobre el resto. Otras canciones como "Winter Lady" abordan la separación de dos desconocidos, mientras que en "The Stranger Song" el autor reflexiona sobre

cómo los amantes son, de hecho, extranjeros. Canciones como "Sisters of Mercy" y "So Long Marianne" contienen un tono musical más alegre en las que caben tanto la ternura como el amor más amable, sin embargo, "So Long Marianne" no deja de ser una canción de despedida, al igual que la siguiente pista "Hey, that's no way to say goodbye", en la que el autor describe la dificultad de decir adiós a su amada.

El tono suave de estas canciones es interrumpido por "Stories of the Street", una canción en la que Cohen muestra un mundo hecho añicos y en el que el amor no es suficiente, así parece anunciar ya con este tema un giro hacia un contenido más social en su próximo disco *Canciones desde una habitación*. Las dos últimas canciones del álbum vuelven de nuevo a los viejos temas de Cohen con "Teachers" y "One of Us cannot be Wrong", en esta última canción el cantante termina con gritos de desesperación ante la indiferencia de la mujer a la que ama, pero en los que en última instancia se encuentra la ironía y el humor del cantante.

La guerra de Vietnam y la presencia continua de la política en los medios de comunicación a finales de los años sesenta influyó probablemente en Cohen a la hora de configurar las letras de las canciones de su segundo disco, en las que el artista abandona su mundo personal con el fin de explorar nuevos temas sociales como la violencia, las drogas, la guerra, la política, tensiones, etc. Además, Cohen no sólo cambia los temas sino también la forma de las canciones, en las que ahora los arreglos se encrudecen y la duración de las pistas se recorta.

El álbum comienza con una confesión en "Bird on a Wire", una canción que recuerda a las canciones de country y en la que el cantante admite su culpa y expresa su deseo de cambiar y llegar a conseguir la redención por sus acciones. En la siguiente canción, "Story of Isaac", Cohen transforma un relato bíblico en una protesta contra la violencia en el mundo antiguo y moderno; es una canción con una letra nítida que impacta al oyente por sus vívidas imágenes de muerte. Otras canciones como "A Bunch of Lonely Heroes" y "The Partisan" exploran la figura del soldado, quien condenado a la más absoluta soledad es siempre víctima de los sistemas por los que combate en lugar de vencedor. Con "Seems so Long, Nancy", el disco abandona las imágenes de guerra aunque sigue ahondando en el universo

de las víctimas, puesto que la protagonista, una mujer joven, termina suicidándose víctima de la sociedad brutal que la rodea. Cohen reanuda el tema del soldado derrotado con "Old Revolution" en la que el autor presenta un mundo cruel y desagradable; lo mismo ocurre en "The Butcher", una canción que describe cómo cada individuo es responsable en cierta medida de la violencia cotidiana que existe en las calles. Las últimas tres canciones del disco retoman el universo personal de Cohen y se ocupan de nuevo de las tensiones que suceden en las relaciones románticas como en "You Know Who I am", "Midnight Lady", y la pieza de cierre "Tonight will be Fine", una melodía alegre y juguetona en la que el autor acepta con entereza la marcha de su amada.

Diferentes *Cohen* emergen, por lo tanto, en una misma década, pero todos comparten una constante que no es otra que la pasión por la música. Así, las canciones están siempre detrás de todas las obras del artista de Montreal, ya sea en la musicalidad de sus colecciones de poesía, las canciones de Marvin Gaye y Ray Charles en *El juego favorito* y *Los hermosos vencidos*, y por supuesto los álbumes de estudio incluyendo *Problemas Populares*, la última colección de canciones de Cohen lanzada al mercado en septiembre de 2014, el día después de su ochenta cumpleaños. Leonard Cohen es, por lo tanto, un *hermoso perdedor* y poeta popular que vive en la aldea global, por lo que cambia con el tiempo y representa con su obra la transición entre el mundo de la impresión en la galaxia Gutenberg y la oralidad que la década de 1960 exigía. Así, tal y como Cohen reconoció en una entrevista concedida al New York Times en el 1969, "Todo lo que escribo tiene guitarras detrás, incluso las novelas" (citado en Simmons 2012: 138). Con esta afirmación Cohen ya estaba anunciando su introducción en el mundo de la música, un arte que le permitiría disolver sus preocupaciones, obsesiones, etc, en los acordes de canciones que misteriosamente fascinaron y aún fascinan al público. Es, por lo tanto, la emoción colectiva de una canción lo que ha hecho de Cohen del gran artista popular de la actualidad.

APPENDIX B:

Summary

This research approaches the study of the works of the Canadian author Leonard Cohen in the decade of the 1960's. It attempts to explore and contextualize questions of identity and desire that have marked Cohen's production throughout all his career. The works that have been selected for this purpose include poetry collections -*The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961) and *Flowers for Hitler* (1964)-; fiction -*The* Favourite *Game* (1963) and *Beautiful Losers* (1966)-; and studio albums -*Songs of Leonard Cohen* (1967) and *Songs from a Room* (1969)-. This dissertation is, then, a journey through the different creative expressions that the Montreal poet explored in the sixties to express artistic, social and individual concerns that have shaped the artist's identities and desires. It captures Cohen's evolution from young and romantic poet, rebellious and provocative writer to finally folk singer in the same tradition that Nietzsche described the figure of the lyricist in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872); he is, then, a poet that encounters in folk music the dual Apollonian and Dionysian impulse that captivates audiences.

In this regard, Cohen's evolution might be easily framed by Marshall McLuhan's concept of 'The Global Village', a term popularized in the Canadian's philosopher work *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962). By means of electronic technology, McLuhan believes that the world has been contracted into a village where information is instantly shared by everyone. It is in this new electronic era where Cohen manages to find his audience and achieve popularity. He leaves aside his

career as poet and fiction writer in order to commit himself to the profession of the troubadour; accommodated in the global village, he becomes a spokesman for his generation with captivating and mysterious songs that abandon the form of the printed book of 'The Gutenberg Galaxy' and embrace the orality of 'The Global Village'. Nevertheless, Cohen's themes and obsessions remain the same whether they are expressed through poems, novels, or songs.

Different *Cohens* concur along the 1960's decade: the romantic, the cynical, the anti-poet, the beatnik, the rebellious, the non-conformist that denounces colonial practices and social distress, the provocative that challenges conventions, the traditionalist, etc. In order to approach each one of them, this research takes as reference the work of several Canadian critics and theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, Michael Ondaatje, or Stephen Scobie; it draws on Sylvie Simmons's biography *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* (2012); and it gathers and uses the work of relevant thinkers and philosophers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the aforementioned Marshall McLuhan, etc. Furthermore, the thesis leans on the articles of various scholars who have studied the works of Leonard Cohen in depth for the analysis and interpretations of the Montreal artist's texts.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters and a final section of conclusions. Chapter one -'*The Spice Box-of Earth*: Poems of a Dark-Romantic Jew'- studies the volume of poetry *The Spice-Box of Earth* by deepening into Cohen's artistic and Jewish identity, as well as by exploring the poet's world of desire from a 'dark romantic' perspective. Chapter two -'*The Favourite Game*: A Fictionalization of Cohen's Artistic Persona'- analyses Cohen's first novel *The Favourite Game* as a central text to understand the Canadian artist's identity and his life in art by means of the alter ego of Lawrence Breavman, the protagonist of the novel. The next chapter -'*Flowers for Hitler*: From Romance to the Concentration Camp'- returns back to the lyric genre in order to approach *Flowers for Hitler* as a text that signals Cohen's shift into the social sphere, probably influenced by the Beat generation of the fifties and the fall into silence of the poet and mentor Abraham. M. Klein, Cohen focuses his interests in the exploration of the concept of evil in the twentieth century by using the Holocaust and Nazi imagery as literary figures.

Chapter four -'*Beautiful Losers*: A Canadian Postmodernist Novel in the Realms of Desire'- continues to deepen into Cohen's preference for the social and political, but it introduces as well a world of saints and 'beautiful losers' that are at the core of his artistic production; furthermore, *Beautiful Losers* signals the path to the Canadian Postmodern due to the disruptive character of the work. Finally, chapter five -'*Songs of Leonard Cohen* and *Songs from a Room*: A New Direction in Cohen's Career'- deals with Cohen's studio albums *Songs of Leonard Cohen* and *Songs form a Room,* where the Canadian artist sings in his first record to a world of lovers and romance, whereas in the second one he opts for an anti-war message that denounces violence and the exploitation of soldiers in the time of the Vietnam War. Next follows a detailed summary of each chapter.

Chapter 1: *The Spice-Box of Earth* is Cohen's second volume of poetry and a central text to understand Cohen's artistic identity, since it contains many of the themes and obsessions that have haunted the Canadian artist throughout the years. The book achieved a great critical success and was well welcomed among audiences, it supposed an important step in Cohen's career after the discreet publication of his first collection of poetry *Let Us Compare Mythologies.* Cohen gains in *The Spice-Box of Earth* precision, clarity, and a maturer voice to display his obsessions, concerns, feelings, etc., in the form of verses; in this regard, he gets rid of the heavy tradition and mythology of his former volume and he decides to explore instead his inner self as an artist. Nevertheless, tradition still persists in the volume as the title of the collection suggests, but it does not occupy a central position; it is instead at the service of the poet and his inner world.

The poems of the collection are ambivalent, since they are both romantic and ironic; it seems that Cohen had gained conscious of the romanticism of *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and decided to mock his romantic attitude in his next volume; however, in his new verses still prevailed a polished style, the rhyme, and a preference for beauty in the form of language. Nevertheless, the themes and questions that the Canadian artist explores become darker in comparison with his first work. The same romantic/ironic attitude relies on the protagonist of Cohen's first novel *The Favourite Game,* who shares some of

his obsessions and concerns with the speaker of *The Spice-Box of Earth,* such as the creative impulse that flows from romantic and sexual relationships, and the inability for commitment with his lovers.

The first part of the volume gathers poems that deal with the process of creation and the relationship between the artist and his work of art. Among these poems stands "A Kite is a Victim", the opening piece of the collection and one of the most representative; it approaches the tensions that exist between the need of control and the desire of freedom. In this regard, the 'kite' becomes "symbolic of our ego and ambitions, of all that is original and free in us" (Ondaatje 1970: 16); it is the artist's desire, thus, to 'tame' and control the kite. Nevertheless, the artist has limitations as shown in poems like "After the Sabbath Prayers" and "The Flowers that I Left in the Ground", where the poet's capacities become diminished to the point of losing the control over the work of art. Nevertheless, other poems of the collection like "If it were Spring" present a dominant artist who does not hesitate to murder in order to create beauty. The poet occupies the same front position in "There are Some Men", but this time with a more dignifying position, since the speaker does not murder but renders homage to a deceased friend. The poem ends with a rejection of the romanticism that often prevails in elegies; the same refusal of romantic values is found in "I Have not Lingered in European Monasteries" or "I Wonder How Many People in this City", where the speaker criticizes but embraces at the same time the romantic tradition. The ambivalent attitude of the speaker in these pieces -on one side, he rejects romanticism, but on the other side, he longs for it- becomes relevant in "The Cuckold's Song", a good poem that does not want to be a poem:

> If this looks like a poem
> I might as well warn you at the beginning
> that it's not meant to be one.
> I don't want to turn anything into poetry (Cohen 1999: 100).

In fact, Cohen the author ends participating in this piece as an actor, so it announces already Cohen's preference for the mask of the anti-poet, an attitude that he will later display in his artistic production.

The second group of poems -and central part of the volume- deals with romantic relationships. Most of the poems approach love from the angle of uncertainty, doubt, personal obsession, etc. Therefore, Cohen distances himself from the notion of ideal love in order to embrace the 'dark side of love' in the same fashion as 'Black Romantic' authors do. In this sense, there are poems that depict relationships of personal domination in terms of violence and cruelty, such as "Morning Song" or "The Girl Toy" -this last one explores as well the fear of the mechanical domination over humankind-; in other poems of the collection, the speaker doubts whether to remain beside her lover or to leave her in order to start a journey of artistic self-discovery, such as it happens in "Travel", or to join the Hebraic nation in their Exodus as in "Credo". The same conflict is shared by Breavman in *The* Favourite *Game,* who finds the perfect lover in Shell but ultimately abandons her in favour of his art. Furthermore, the poem of the collection "As the Mist Leaves No Scar" -which appears as the epigraph of Cohen's first novel- suggests the painful ending of a relationship. Despite the 'delicateness' and the atmosphere of innocence that surrounds the verses, the piece is a grave and harsh poem that shows Cohen's preference for the 'dark'. On the contrary, "For Anne" is a simple ballad where it is not clear where romance begins and irony ends; in this regard, it is an ambivalent piece that goes hand in hand with the spirit of the volume.

Nevertheless, the central and most representative piece from this group is "You Have the Lovers", a poem that introduces the themes that Cohen later resumes in *Beautiful Losers*. Sexuality is at the core of the poem, which deals with the love-making of a couple and the presence of a third observer that ultimately participates in the encounter in order to achieve sainthood. In this regard, sexuality becomes a new religion and a discipline to be learned in order to gain the sainthood that the protagonists of *Beautiful Losers* desperately seek.

The third group of poems reflect on Cohen's Jewish inheritance. There are poems dedicated to other artists and poets, such as "Last Dance at the Four

Penny", which it is addressed to Cohen's friend and poet Irving Layton and certifies the decline of tradition with the end of the 'freilach' -a Jewish dance-; "Song for Abraham Klein" and "To a Teacher" confirm this decay with the silence of Cohen's teacher, who ceases to be the prophet of the community secluded at home and silenced by a mental illness. Other poems from this group explore the glory of the Hebraic community, such as in "Out of the Land of Heaven", a joyful celebration dedicated to the painter Marc Chagall. On the other hand, the darker side of the Jewish inheritance finds its best expression on "The Genius", an ironic and terrifying poem that deepens into the different stereotyped roles that Jews have carried throughout history; however, the poem ends in tragedy in the last stanza with the irruption of the Holocaust.

Finally, the book ends rendering homage to prophets like Isaiah and also Cohen's grandfather; this last stands as the protagonist of the closing piece of the collection "Lines of My Grandfather's Journal", an extended prose poem that reflects again -such as in "A Kite is a Victim"- on the tensions between tradition and creation, or in other words, between control and freedom.

Chapter 2: *The Favourite Game* narrates the story and the process of maturity into adulthood of a young artist from Montreal that ultimately abandons his community in order to live under the promise of free-will. The novel shares multiple parallelisms with James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* since they are both modern narrations that adopt the romantic form of the *Künstlerroman* -a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman* that narrates the creative awakening and the discovery of the artistic vocation of a young artist-. The romantic background of the novel coexists with Breavman's ironic attitude, who often jokes about his own romanticism and artistic ambitions; nevertheless, Breavman is still a romantic who idealizes childhood and romance.

Lawrence Breavman is the fictional alter ego of Leonard Cohen, who gives an account of his childhood and youthful memories in Montreal and New York; the book is, then, a sort of autobiography narrated in the third person. In fact, there are many characters of the novel inspired by Cohen's friends

and family, such as the protagonist's best friend 'Krantz' resembles the sculptor Mort Rosengarten, and 'Shell' was inspired by Cohen's first girlfriend Georgianna Sherman. In this regard, Carmen Ellison with the article "Not My Real Face" and many other critics have explored Cohen's personal implication in the novel as a "thinly veiled autobiography" (McFarlane 1999: 73).

The novel is still modernist, but it employs techniques of intertextuality, self-reflexibility, and characterization that remind of a postmodernist sensibility; it also includes meta-reflections on the creative process, as well as structures of auto-referentiality such as the *mise en abyme*. Nevertheless, the novel is self-reflexive in content but not in form; it does not deepen, thus, into the realms of metafiction in contrast with Cohen's second novel *Beautiful Losers*.

The plot of the novel is almost non-existent; the text deals instead with different moments in the life of the artist from the 1940's to the 1950's. In this regard, the book contains four parts in which the reader gets to know Breavman as a child and adolescence; it explores the protagonist's obsessions, concerns, relationships, etc. These episodes employ a cinematic imagery that constructs Breavman's portrait. The novel appears, then, as a set of scenes in which Breavman plays the protagonist role. On the other hand, this cinematic imagery connects *The* Favourite *Game* with other literary works of the time, such as *The Catcher in the Rye* and *On the Road*; indeed, this last work relates Cohen with countercultural movements like the Beats, who were like Cohen interested in the exploration of the self and in the undertaking of a creative and religious quest.

The novel emerges as a central text to understand Cohen's Jewish-Canadian identity as an artist; it explores the city of Montreal, New York, and the natural spaces of Canada. Furthermore, the novel offers a decadent portrait of Canada as a nation of conformists and conventional bourgeois worried about business instead of religion. Breavman reacts against this environment by embracing the life of the bohemian artist. He betrays his community and family -who expect him to become a prosperous businessman and to follow the family tradition- and searches for new role models. In this regard, Breavman finds a refuge in art and romantic

relationships. He becomes the romantic artist of his community, but at the same time he feels very conscious about his image and work, which often mocks it with irony; nevertheless, as a great romantic, he still wonders about nature and longs for a return to childhood.

Breavman's evolution during the novel contrasts with the one of his friend Krantz, who ultimately turns into a conventional young adult who works at a summer camp and has a girlfriend. Krantz is, then, absorbed by the system; whereas Breavman remains as the outsider and rebel of the community. The separation of the two friends and the ending of their friendship will be precipitated by Martin's death at the summer camp –a young boy and mathematical genius run over by a tractor in a marsh-; Breavman, who was a close friend of Martin is deeply affected by the tragic event, so he ends leaving the summer camp and certifies with the death of the young boy the ending of "the conventional world".

Breavman not only finds in art a refuge from "the conventional world" but from time; in fact, art provides him the illusion of permanence. In this sense, Breavman desperately seeks throughout the novel to stop time and to make moments eternal; he stops family movies and he tries to preserve all the memories of his childhood and adolescence, such as playing with Lisa in the snow or driving with Krantz in the streets of Montreal. Nevertheless, Breavman acknowledges decay in the destruction of the bodies in the novel: from the death of his father at an early age to the ageing face of her mother and the scars of her body. In this regard, scars become an important symbol in the novel that confirm deterioration; they certify Breavman's failure in his attempt to preserve life. But scars do not only damage physical appearance, since they might be invisible such as the one that Martin leaves in Breavman when he dies. Furthermore, Breavman himself brands his lovers with scars when he ultimately abandons them in favour of his art.

As a young adult, Breavman cannot rely anymore on the games of his childhood, which he used them to explore the world of feelings without hurting no one, such as he did with Lisa in "The Soldier and the Whore". Nevertheless, adolescence and the discovery of sexuality interrupt these games and Breavman loses control over them. It is at this point when the young artist becomes involved in romantic relationships in which he

separates the social life from the sexual one, so he can control his involvement in them and preserve a sense of detachment that allows him to leave his lovers once the artistic duty calls him; in this regard, lovers provide him artistic inspiration, but he needs to leave them in order to continue his spiritual quest.

Breavman even leaves 'Shell', the young woman he meets at Columbia and he calls “the perfect wife”. She is an individual capable of making him to abandon the life of the artist in order to become a conventional citizen. Indeed, Shell is not another lover in *The Favourite Game* but the protagonist of her own story in the third part of the novel, where the reader gets to know her relationship with her husband Gordon and her occasional affair with a University teacher from Lebanon. Therefore, Shell is not for Breavman another beautiful woman to put into a pedestal, but a “particular person”. However, it is arguable Cohen's treatment of female character in the novel, who appear to be mostly at the service of the protagonist, even Shell's story seems to be at Breavman's disposal. Anyway, Breavman's ultimate goal seems always the creation of beautiful images in order to leave them later, so women become the perfect inspiration that he ultimately abandons. At the end of the novel, Breavman sits in a cafeteria once he has ceased his relationships with both Shell and Krantz; he is alone but still preserves his memories in the exile and a promise of free will. He is an artist ready to undertake a new journey.

Chapter 3: In *Flowers for Hitler*, Cohen ends with the outstanding lyricism and traditional style of his former poetry books and moves towards a contemporary verse that allows him to explore new themes and paths. Cohen's change of style caused different reactions among critics, who praised and criticized the volume in equal parts; nevertheless, the Canadian artist managed to win with these poems the Québec Literary Award in 1964 and he started an intense promotional tour that firmly established his status as public persona.

Cohen's new poems break with the traditional form of the English poetry of the nineteenth century; he adopts instead a free verse, a deliberately ugly and prosaic language, as well as he mixes genres such as prose and drama.

In this regard, the book is not a collection of beautiful poetry but a stance of a poet who does not believe in poetry anymore, i.e., it is the stance of the anti-poet that he timidly announced in his former collection *The Spice-Box of Earth.* Furthermore, Cohen adds new themes to his world of master and slaves in order to explore some of the social realities of the twentieth-century, such as the Cold War, Canada, and mainly Nazism and the Holocaust. In this regard, the artist does not deal with these events from a historical but personal perspective, then Cohen's treatment of tragic events such as the Holocaust caused a division of opinions among critics -for example, Sandra Djawa viewed Cohen's work as sensationalist, whereas others like Sandra Wynands understood the poet's use of the Holocaust as a means to shock audiences and trigger questions-. Furthermore, the poems of the collection explore the question on whether the Holocaust was an isolated event in history, or on the contrary it could be repeated again under different circumstances. Cohen firmly responds that the Holocaust is not a special form of evil, but another manifestation of human hatred from which everyone is responsible. In this regard, he uses the words of the writer and camp-survivor Primo Lévi as the epigraph of the volume:

> If from the inside of the lager, a message
> could have seeped out to free men, it would
> have been this: Take care not to suffer in
> your own homes what is inflected on us here (as cited in Ondaatje 1970: 38).

Evil is, then, everywhere and not only in the concentration camps. In order to express this concern, Cohen opts for the anti-style that challenges the reader's moral categories of what is acceptable. The poet adopts experimental techniques, surrealism and symbolism, as well as he adds in the poems dates, footnotes, lists, diary-entries, etc. In this sense, *Flowers for Hitler* already foreshadows the style of the Canadian artist's second novel *Beautiful Losers* -the most celebrated of Cohen's work and the piece in which he fully develops his themes and style-. Therefore, *Flowers for Hitler* becomes

a fundamental work in the writing of *Beautiful Losers;* furthermore, some of the 'saints' that appear in Cohen's poetry, such as Alexander Trocchi, Queen Victoria, and Irving Layton become the kernel for Cohen's protagonists in *Beautiful Losers.* Thus, with *Flowers for Hitler*, Cohen decided to abandon his inner old world in order to make a step forward and become the prophet -the outsider- of his community that explores new territories such as the world of evil and the path towards sainthood.

Cohen breaks with his former style in the opening poem of the collection -"What I am Doing Here"- where the Canadian artist uses a prosaic language and flees away from poetic ornament. The poem stands as a confession of the speaker's guilt in the construction of a cruel society; however, the speaker is not the sole responsible and he ultimately emerges from a position of moral superiority. He is, indeed, the leader that refuses to take shelter in "the universal alibi". Therefore, what at the beginning seems to be a confession ends as the stance of a front-line writer who invites his audience to 'confess'. The speaker adopts the same attitude in "The Hearth", but this time Cohen introduces self-mockery, "I also learnt my lust / was not so rare a masterpiece" (2011: 10), so the tone is not as confident as in "What I am Doing Here". In this sense, other poems like "Destiny" relativize the poet's profession and display an open sense of self-parody where there is no place for the front-line writer.

The poem "Style" -the central piece of *Flowers for Hitler*- deals with Cohen's new attitude towards poetry. The poem adopts a total lack of carelessness in the form -no strophes, no punctuation, etc.-; however, it is still a good poem with style that paradoxically proclaims the destruction of style. The anti-poetic attitude reigns in poems like "Montreal 1964" and "The Music Crept by Us", where any attempt of beauty is run over by the vulgarity of the verses. However, the collection also offers poems that do not directly reflect on style but in the social reality, such as the witty and ironic "The Only Tourist in Havana Turns His Thoughts Homeward", where the poet makes a retrospection of Canada's problems from the convulsive island of Cuba; he proposes, indeed, a battery of humorous and mostly impossible actions to solve the problems. Another satirical poem is "Business as Usual", where the poet strongly criticizes Canadian politicians, "The favourite

villains of all Canadians" (Scobie 1978: 36).

As aforementioned, there are poems in the collection that explore terrible and dark aspects of the human soul, such as "A Migrating Dialogue", a piece that implicates the whole Western culture in the Nazi atrocities. Cohen uses Nazi imagery and provocative images that challenge conventional aesthetics; by means of surrealism, he includes different events in history such as Hiroshima, the First World War, the fire on German cities like Dresden, etc. The speaker rambles from one event to another until the end of the poem where the reader is confronted with a disturbing image of Hitler, Eva Braun, and Geli Raubal making love.

The image of Hitler adopts in the volume a surreal tone; he is the protagonist of poems like "Hitler the Brain-Mole", "Hitler", and "Opium and Hitler", where fantasy and historical scenarios coexist. On the other hand, there are poems like "The Invisible Trouble" and "Heirloom" that transfer the concentration camp into the domestic and psychological realm. Then, terror and hatred play an important role not only in Nazism but in everyday reality. However, the Nazi imagery prevails in the volume with poems like "All There is to know about Adolf Eichmann" and "Goebbels Abandons his Novel and Joins the Party", which introduce two important figures of Nazism as average men instead of villains. Therefore, the speaker highlights again the idea that evil is not something exclusive of a reduced group of men, so Goebbels and Eichmann become common men in a world of terror.

Despite the new world of terror that Cohen explores in *Flowers for Hitler*, there are still poems in the collection that approach relationships of power and resume the rhetoric of the teacher and pupil present in *The Spice-Box of Earth;* some examples are "My Mentors", "My Teacher is Dying", and "Old Dialogues", in which Cohen describes training processes that remind the reader of F's lessons in *Beautiful Losers* to become a saint. Furthermore, the collection includes poems that directly reflect on the figure of the saint who overcomes the terrors of reality in order to achieve sainthood, such as in "For Anyone Dressed in Marble". *Flowers for Hitler* dedicates poems, thus, to a group of 'Beautiful Losers' who do not fit in society and take refuge in the world of pop -such as it happens in "Order"-, or in a new dance step – as in

“The New Step”- that shows outcasts how to transcend reality. Furthermore, historical characters like Queen Victoria, Irving Layton, and Alexander Trocchi become the 'new saints' of modernity.

The collection closes with a group of highly romantic poems that echo Cohen's first work *Let Us Compare Mythologies* and flee away from the world of evil that prevails in the volume. Thus, “Nothing I can Lose”, “For E.J.P”, and “Another Night with Telescope” return Cohen the crown of 'the golden-boy poet' in Canadian letters.

Chapter 4: *Beautiful Losers* is a novel about Canada and its history: the text goes back and forth in time in order to present a land of victors and victims in accordance with the Canadian psyche that identifies itself with victims (Atwood 1972). In this regard, the protagonist of *Beautiful Losers* is a victim that needs to be a victim, just as the rest of the characters of the novel are to some extent victims too. The protagonist 'I' shares with the Canadian ethos a 'garrison mentality' that oppresses him in the form of History, a burden and a system that the narrator's best friend, F., tries to destroy with a training method designed to escape from systems and embrace magic.

In addition to the narrator's personal story in the contemporary Quebec, the novel displays a political discourse about Canada and its history that comprises the French invasions and the influence of contemporary American culture. Through the character of the virgin Catherine Tekawitha, the reader gets to know First Nation's tribes in Canada and the Jesuits colonization in the seventeenth century, a process that included imperialistic practices such as changing proper names and converting natives into the Catholic faith. However, the British managed throughout the years to gain control over the French and impose their language and traditions until the construction of the modern Quebec, where the protagonist trio -the narrator, his wife Edith, and F.- lives.

The novel captures the vibe of the Montreal of the sixties and the prevailing tensions among First Nations, French, and English; in this sense, F. is a French Canadian and revolutionary that blows the statue of Queen Victoria, Edith is a native from the same tribe of Catherine Tekawitha raped by Frenchmen, and the narrator is an English speaking Jew harassed by a

crowd of Quebecois. The narrator blames institutions like the Catholic church to whom he accuses of being responsible for these tensions, as well as he points out to the Church's inability to confront sexuality and conceal the sense of frustration that prevails in modern Canada. Nevertheless, the Church is not the sole responsible for Canada's problems; in this sense, the culture of the US menaces to sweep the Canadian identity with Hollywood movies and new saints like Marilyn Monroe. Furthermore, the tone of the novel becomes 'carnivalesque' (Bakhtin 1965), then popular expressions that come from America like comic books and pop songs turn into high art, whereas the Canadian poetry written in high style sounds ridicule. In this sense, Cohen is interested in "the material bodily lower stratum" (Bakhtin 1984: 23) that returns sexuality and corporal realities back to the core of literature.

Cohen inaugurated with *Beautiful Losers* the Canadian Postmodern, a new narrative tradition based on the philosophical ideas of postmodernism and the works of authors like Samuel Beckett, Alexander Trocchi, and William S. Burroughs. Nevertheless, the specifics of the Canadian nation offer a new understanding of the tradition, in which the duality of a society "caught between two worlds" (Hutcheon 1991: 81) challenges the notions of centre and margin; in this sense, irony, paradox, and satire become the perfect means to approach the postcolonial experience of a 'commonwealth' literature. Another important concept in the Canadian Postmodern is 'Historiographic Metafiction', which alludes to the fiction based on historical events, but at the same time it openly reflects on the act of writing and the nature of fiction, such as the narrator of *Beautiful Losers* continuously remarks, "O Reader, do you know that a man is writing this? A man like you" (Cohen 2001: 102). Furthermore, the reader plays an important role in the construction of meaning in the novel -he needs to suspend his logic and accept the indeterminacy of the work of art- since the 'implied contract' between writer and reader has been destroyed.

The indeterminacy of the novel makes the narration complex and difficult to understand; the book is divided into three parts narrated by different voices -the narrator's diary, F's letter, and the epilogue in the third person-. The narrative is not linear and the plot is confusing and barely relevant, it is

instead the expansion of the character's situations what matters. Intertextuality plays an important role in this expansion, since it provides materials based on different traditions such as Jesuit chronicles, Indian legends, and comic books that allow Cohen to construct his own hagiography. Furthermore, the novel does not only employ textual references but other media from the sixties such as the radio, cinema, advertisements, etc., that contribute to construct a collage glued by the drive of desire.

Desire is restricted by the English language -an insufficient means to express emotion-; on the contrary, Iroquois emerges as the language of emotion and the ideal vehicle to express the hidden meanings of "all talking men". First nations rely on oral language to transmit knowledge and traditions, whereas in modern Canada prevails the written mode of the prayer book that F. gives to the narrator; a book in which there are two columns in Greek and its English translation that illustrate the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane that the sociologist Émile Durkhem coined in order to distinguish transcendence from mundanity. The book illustrates as well the problems of communication that Catherine Tekawitha suffers in different situations, which ultimately end in the silence of a prayer. Furthermore, the written words of the prayer book along with Cohen's use of capital letters remind the reader of the visual aspect of a novel constructed both from the oral -the language of the tribe and new media as the radio- and the aforementioned visual. This division brings at the front McLuhan's ideas about the written and oral nature of language; in this sense, the 'old' language -the one of modern Canada- is close to the print form since it relies on the individual; whereas the 'new' language relies on the community and the tribe.

It is precisely the 'new' language the one that the author associates with the feminine sound "hiss" that contrasts with the masculine 'shhh' that silences the group. Therefore, the 'new' language needs to incorporate the feminine principle to the masculine one, so they both converge in the expression of desire. The feminine principle is embodied in Isis, the Egyptian goddess that represents all the feminine characters in the novel who bring comfort to the world, such as Edith, Catherine Tekawitha, and Mary Voolnd.

It is by lifting the veil of Isis that the protagonist will find the path to sainthood and the reader will manage to understand the text. Furthermore, the lifting of the veil is already announced in the epigraph of the novel with a Ray Charles' song that changes the word 'veil' for the 'bale'.

It is in the third part of the novel when the old man of the epilogue visits the Stem Theatre and turns into a movie of Ray Charles that invades the sky of Montreal; the protagonist manages, thus, to transcend reality and reach sainthood. Nevertheless, the narrator has previously learnt to forget about individual consciousness and embrace collective emotion by means of F.'s trainings. F. wants to return magic back to mundane reality, however, he fails since oppression still persists in the extremes of religious fervour and the exploration of sexuality, from which Catherine Tekawitha and Edith respectively die. On the other hand, F. ends defeated and confined in a psychiatric. It is there when the *Quebecois* recognizes that his discipline -the narrator- has transcended his teachings and he is ready to find the balance of the saints; the narrator is the only one, then, ready to 'lift the veil'. The love and sexual triangle among the protagonists is broken and the old man of the epilogue emerges as the convergence of the sacred and the profane.

Sexuality plays a protagonist role in *Beautiful Losers;* it is not only a personal but a political and social issue that connects Cohen's novel with the work of the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, who describe desire as a positive process of production that produces reality. In this sense, Canada becomes a universe of "desiring machines" that frees individuals from rigid categories. However, sexuality finds its most cruel expression in the episode of Edith's rape, a colonial practice in the form of sexual aggression. On the other hand, sexuality becomes mechanized in the novel with experiences such as "The Telephone Dance", "The Danish Vibrator", and "the ordinary eternal machinery", all of them intense moments that connect protagonists, just like songs do, with the promise of sainthood.

Chapter 5: Cohen made a change of direction in his career with the publication of his first album *Songs of Leonard Cohen*; he crossed the Canadian frontiers and managed to capture the attention of the European and North American audiences. Despite problems and disagreements with

producers, Cohen's record was finally released on December 1967. The album featured ten songs that gathered Cohen's personal world of masters and slaves, romanticism, irony, violence, etc. The record had an intimate character due to Cohen's lyrics and the elegant production of the songs that highlighted Cohen's voice over the rest of instruments.

"Suzanne" is the opening track and one of the most popular songs in the world of pop, it approaches the figure of the 'Beautiful Loser' with the character of 'Suzanne', a fascinating woman that lives by the river. She embodies the saint -she is compared with Jesus- that teaches her discipline "where to look / among the garbage and the flowers" (Cohen 2009). In this regard, the song is surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery that has fascinated audiences over the years due to Cohen's melody, the lyrics, the symbolism of water, the female chorus, etc.

Nevertheless, the record contains as well tracks that explore darker aspects of love, such as the triangle of "The Master Song", in which each member seeks to obtain power over the rest. Other songs like "Winter Lady" deal with the separation of two strangers, whereas "The Stranger Song" reflects on how lovers are, indeed, strangers that play games. Songs like "Sisters of Mercy" and "So Long Marianne" sound cheerful; they describe, in fact, a gentle kind of love; however, "So Long Marianne" is a song of parting, just as the following track "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye" describes the difficulty of saying goodbye to the beloved one.

The gentle tone of the aforementioned tracks is suddenly interrupted by "Stories of the Street", a song that changes the mood of the record with a description of a world turned into pieces; in this regard, the social content of this song contrasts with the rests of the tracks of the album and it announces Cohen's change into a more committed social 'I' in *Songs from a Room.* The last two songs of the album return back to Cohen's old themes with "Teachers" and "One of Us Cannot Be Wrong"; in this last track, the singer addresses cries of love to the woman that ignores him, but it ultimately prevails humour and irony in the singer's desperation.

The Vietnam War and the continuous presence of politics in the media at the end of the sixties probably influenced the lyrics of *Songs from a Room,* an album that abandoned Cohen's personal world in order to explore themes

such as social violence, drugs, war, political tensions, etc. Furthermore, Cohen did not only change the themes but the form of the songs too, since the arrangements were rawer and the tracks were shorter in length.

The record begins with a confession in "Bird on a Wire", a song that reminds listeners of old country songs; the speaker admits his guilt and expresses his desire to change and reach redemption. In the next song "Story of Isaac", Cohen transforms a biblical account into a protest against violence in the ancient and modern world; it is a very vivid song, indeed, that impacts the listener with images of death. Other songs like "A Bunch of Lonesome Heroes" and "The Partisan" explore the figure of the soldier, who locked in his solitude is ultimately a victim instead of a victor. With "Seems So Long, Nancy", the album abandons the war imagery but not the world of victims, since the protagonist -a young woman- ends committing suicide victim of the cruel society that surrounds her; it is a very moving song that captured the attention of audiences such as "Suzanne" in Cohen's former album did. Cohen resumes the theme of the defeated soldier in "The Old Revolution", where he presents a cruel and nasty world; the same world of "The Butcher", a song that describes how everyone is responsible to some extent of the everyday violence in the streets. The last three songs of the record resume Cohen's personal world and deal again with the tensions of romantic relationships in "You Know Who I am", "Midnight Lady", and the closing piece "Tonight Will Be Fine", a happy and playful tune that faces the departing of the beloved with a "fine memory".

Different *Cohens* emerge then in the same decade, but they all share a constant, which is none other than the passion for music; music is actually behind all the Montreal artist's works: the musicality of his poetry collections, the songs of Marvin Gaye and Ray Charles in *The* Favourite *Game* and *Beautiful Losers,* and of course all Cohen's studio albums including his last *Popular Problems* released on September 2014 the day after his eightieth birthday. Leonard Cohen is, thus, a 'Beautiful Loser' and a popular poet that lives in the Global Village, so he changes over time and he mutates from the print of the Gutenberg Galaxy to the orality that the age of the 1960's demanded. As Cohen told in 1969 to the *New York Times,* "All of my

writing has guitars behind it, even the novels" (as cited in Simmons 2012: 138). With this affirmation Cohen was already announcing his shift to the world of music; a world that enabled him to dissolve his self and all of his obsessions into the chords of songs that mysteriously fascinated and still fascinate audiences. It is, then, the collective emotion of a song what made of Cohen the great popular artist he is today.